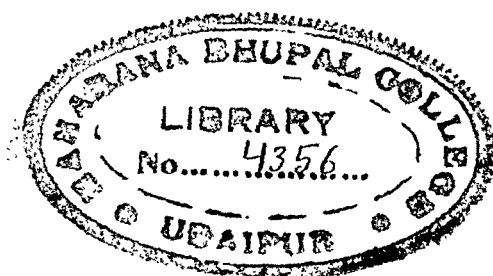


# CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

(April, 1850—July, 1850)



# CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

By  
C. A. SAINTE-BEUVE

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Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by  
E. J. TRECHMANN, M.A., Ph.D



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exact explanation. A scrutiny might lay bare many defects in both of them, many softnesses or weak spots, but the first impression remains true and is still the last. Among French poets La Fontaine seems to be the only one who, partly, answered to what Fénelon wished when he said in a letter to La Motte, that man of wit so unlike La Fontaine : ' I am the more touched by what is exquisite in our language, because it is neither tuneful, nor varied, nor free, nor bold, nor adapted for soaring, and because our scrupulous versification renders beautiful lines almost impossible in a large work '. La Fontaine, with a language as defined by Fénelon, succeeded however in apparently making light work of poetry and in arousing in those of most delicate taste that sense of the exquisite so rarely aroused by the moderns. He fulfilled that other wish of Fénelon : ' We should, if I am not mistaken, take only the flower of each object, and touch nothing that we cannot embellish '. And, lastly, he appears to have been sent into the world expressly to prove that in French poetry it was not quite impossible to realize Fénelon's further desire : ' I should like a something I cannot describe, namely a facility very difficult to attain '. Take our celebrated authors, you will find in them nobility, power, eloquence, elegance, sublimity in parts ; but that indescribable facility which is communicated to all feelings, to all thoughts, and which gains even the reader, that facility mingled with persuasiveness, you will hardly ever find except in Fénelon and La Fontaine.

The reputation of both these men (a remarkable thing) went on increasing in the eighteenth century, whilst that of many of their illustrious contemporaries seemed to diminish and was unjustly disputed. I would not answer for it that these two renowns, diversely pleasing but not dissimilar in such different spheres, were not sometimes overrated, and that there did not enter into their praise some of that exaggeration and declamation which were so repugnant to the men themselves. Thus, Fénelon has been highly praised for a tolerance in doctrine and almost for a laxness which certainly was not his. The philosophers appropriated him as if he were one of themselves, and he found favour even with those who would crush what he adored. But must I say, it ? In spite of all the just remarks which may be opposed

to this philosophic view which they falsely attributed to him, those who treated him with that particular favour had a not entirely mistaken instinct ; for if Fénelon's doctrine may not be called tolerant, his person and character were so, and he was able to put into everything a tone, a turn of grace, an earnestness which was a passport for everything, even his rigorous directions.

I find, even in the volume I have just read, a few which might appear so, and which show that Fénelon was by no means a bishop according to the too accommodating ordination of La Harpe, d'Alembert and Voltaire. A portion of the new letters (and they are not by the way the most interesting) are written to M. de Bernières, at that time Intendant of Hainaut and afterwards of Flanders. This M. de Bernières, sprung, if I am not mistaken, from a family in very close relations with Port-Royal, was a good man, with a good head, who lived in perfect harmony with the Archbishop of Cambrai. In March, 1700, Fénelon wrote to him to regulate, in concert with him, the observation of the Church laws for Lent : ' It appeared to me, says the prelate, that the rule could never be re-established, if we did not hasten to renew it after ten years of continuous dispensation. The peace was confirmed more than two years ago ; the winter is mild ; the season is pretty forward, and there should be more vegetables than in the other years ; the dearth is diminishing daily. If we still allowed the people to eat eggs, there would come a kind of precept contrary to the law, as happened in the case of milk, butter and cheese.' . . . Here then we see Fénelon a bishop in good earnest, entering into the strictest details, and attaching importance to them. But side by side we find again, even in such details, the Fénelon of tradition, the popular Fénelon. In this same Lent of 1700 M. de Bernières no doubt advocated certain dispensations of diet for the army, and Fénelon hastens to grant them to the private soldiers ; but ' it is not likely, Sir, he adds, that I should grant the officers, paid by the King, a dispensation which I refuse to the poorest among the people '. This feeling of justice especially towards the humble, this well-being of the people again visibly occupies his thoughts in other places ; but it would tell us nothing new, and I pass on to other letters of the collection.

There are a few addressed to Mme. de Maintenon. Fénelon, it is well known, had been among those she patronized most, whom she consulted and listened to most, before she had the weakness to desert him. Saint-Simon has given us in his *Memoirs* such a graphic account of Fénelon's entry at Court, his introduction to the little exclusive society of Mme. de Maintenon, the Dukes of Beauvilliers and Chevreuse, of the rapid rise to fortune of the happy prelate, so soon followed by so many vicissitudes and disfavours, all that wreck of his hopes which now forms a pathetic part of his fame, that we can only refer to that painter, since it would be a profanation to meddle with such pictures, even though we believe they have a few doubtful points. Saint-Simon was gifted with a double genius which is rarely found united in the same degree: from nature he had received that gift of penetration, almost of intuition, that gift of reading the minds and hearts through faces and expressions, and of catching in them the hidden play of motives and intentions; to this penetrating observation of the masks and actors without number which thronged around him, he carried a verve, an ardour of curiosity, which at times appears insatiable and almost cruel: the greedy anatomist is not more eager to open the still palpitating breast, and to search it in all directions in order to reveal the hidden sore. To this first gift of instinctive and irresistible penetration Saint-Simon joined another which is equally seldom found in such a powerful degree, and which by reason of its bold turn makes him unique of his kind: what he had plucked out with such ruthless curiosity, he reproduced in writing with the same fire, with the same ardour and almost the same fury of the brush. La Bruyère too has the faculty of keen and sagacious observation; he remarks, he uncovers everything and every man around him; with subtlety he reads their secrets on all those faces which surround him; then, returned to his privacy and leisure, with gusto, with skill, with deliberation, he outlines his portraits, he recommences them he touches them up and caresses them, he adds such after touch until he finds them an exact resemblance. But that is not Saint-Simon's way. After those days of Versailles or Marly, which I may call debauches of observation (so many copious, conflicting and diverse ones

did he amass !), he returns home all in a glow, and there, pen in hand, at full gallop, without rest, without reading over, and far into the night, he commits to paper quite fresh, in their fullness and natural confusion, and at the same time with an incomparable distinctness of relief, the thousand persons he has crossed, the thousand originals he has caught in passing, whom he carries off still palpitating, and most of whom have through him become immortal victims.

Fénelon just escaped being one of his victims ; for, among the charming and delightful qualities he recognizes in him, he perpetually dwells upon a secret vein of ambition which, in the degree he supposes, would make Fénelon quite a different man from that we love to see him in reality. On this point we believe that the picture of the great painter should, in order to remain true, suffer a little moderation, that his verve has allowed itself too much latitude. He had not penetrated and dwelled at leisure in all the recesses of that amiable soul. Through the Dukes of Beauvilliers and Chevreuse, Saint-Simon had known Fénelon as well as one may know a man through his most intimate friends. He had seen very little of him directly, and he tells us so : ' I only knew him by sight, having been too young when he was exiled '. Still a mere sight was enough for such a painter to seize and to reproduce the charm, and with marvellous truth :

' This prelate, he says, was a tall, thin man, a good figure, pale, with a large nose, eyes from which fire and intellect gushed like a torrent, and a physiognomy the like of which I have not seen, and which one could not forget though one had seen it only once. It combined everything, and opposites did not struggle upon it. It had gravity and gallantry, seriousness and gaiety ; it suggested equally the man of learning, the bishop and the grand seigneur, and what was uppermost in his face, as in his whole person, was shrewdness, wit, grace, modesty, and above all nobility. It required an effort to cease looking at him . . . '

When one has once painted a man in those colours and shown him gifted with such power of attraction, one can never be accused afterwards of slandering him, even though one should have misjudged him in several points. Besides, Saint-Simon may be advantageously combated and corrected by Saint-Simon himself. Read

what he says so admirably of the Duke of Burgundy, that cherished pupil of Fénelon, whom the prelate did not cease to guide from afar, even from his exile at Cambrai, through the medium of the Dukes of Beauvilliers and Chevreuse. That young prince, whom Saint-Simon shows so haughty, so spirited, so terribly passionate at the beginning, so contemptuous to everybody, of whom he was able to say : ' From a celestial height he looked down upon men as mere atoms, with whom he had nothing in common, whoever they might be ; even his brothers hardly appeared intermediary between himself and the human race ' ; this same prince, at a certain moment, is modified and transformed, becomes quite another man, pious, humane, charitable as well as enlightened, attentive to his duties, quite awake to his responsibilities as future king, and this heir of Louis XIV dares to utter, in the very drawing-room at Marly, these words which are capable of making the roof fall, ' that a king is made for his subjects, and not the subjects for him '. Well ! this prince thus portrayed by Saint-Simon, whose death forces from him, the inexorable observer, notes of sincere eloquence and tears, who had transformed him thus ? We will allow as much credit as you think is due to the mysterious and invisible operation of the spirit, even to what they call grace ; we will allow due credit to his excellent governor, the venerable Duc de Beauvilliers ; but, among human instruments, to whom can we give a larger share than to Fénelon, the man who, near and far, did not cease to directly influence his pupil, to inculcate, to insinuate that maxim about the *father of his country*, ' that a king is made for his people ', and all that depends upon it ?

We now know more on that point, in certain respects, than did Saint-Simon : we have the confidential letters which Fénelon wrote from the beginning to the young prince, the memoranda he drew up for him, the plans of reform, all those documents which were then secret, and now are divulged, and which, whilst allowing to human ambition the place that should always be given to the defects of each even in his virtues, show the latter at least in the first rank, and henceforth place in its full light the patriotic and generous soul of Fénelon.

Bossuet too, in concert with the Duc de Montausier,



had a pupil to educate, the first Dauphin, the father of this same Duke of Burgundy; it was for that royal and not very worthy pupil that he composed so many admirable works, beginning with the *Discours sur l'Histoire universelle*, which posterity possesses in permanence. But, when we look into the matter, what a difference in respect of care and solicitude! The first Dauphin was no doubt less amenable to education; he was indolent to the point of apathy. The Duke of Burgundy, with his passions and even his vices, had at least energy, and betrayed the sacred fire within him. 'Vivacious and susceptible natures, said Fénelon, with excellent reason, are capable of terrible aberrations: they are carried away by passions and presumption; but they have also great resources and often make up for much lost ground . . . whilst on the other hand one has no hold on indolent natures'. And yet do we see that Bossuet, to overcome his pupil's laziness, to spur his sensibility, did anything like as much as Fénelon did, in the second case, to tame and humanize the violent nature of his? The former great man did his duty amply and majestically, according to his wont, and then went his way. The latter continued his attentions and his fears, his ingenious and vigilant cares, his insinuating and persuasive address, as if bound by his affection; he had the tenderness of a mother.

To return to the present volume, I was saying then that we find in it some letters from Fénelon, newly admitted to Court, to Mme. de Maintenon, who was still under the spell of his charm. The tone of Fénelon's *Spiritual Letters* is in general delicate, subtle, shrewd; very agreeable to gentle and feminine spirits, but rather soft and spoiled by the cant of a quietistic spirituality; we are too sensible of the vicinity of Mme. Guyon. Fénelon besides is too lavish of expressions that tend to childishness and affectation, such as Saint François de Sales addresses to his ideal woman of piety, his *Philothée*. Speaking of certain familiarities and caresses which the heavenly Father, according to him, bestows upon the souls that have returned to humility and simplicity, Fénelon, for example, will say: 'One must be a child, O my God, and play on Thy knees to deserve them'. Theologians have taken exception to these and the like

What assuredly is not a fault is the general character of his piety, the piety he feels and inspires. He thinks that piety should combine joy, lightheartedness, indulgence; he banishes from it melancholy and severity: 'Piety, he said, has nothing feeble, sad and constrained: it makes the heart bigger, it is simple and pleasing; it makes itself all things to all men, to win them over'. He reduces piety almost entirely to love—that is to say, charity. This indulgence, however, is in him not weakness nor complaisance. In the few counsels which are here given to Mme. de Maintenon, he is able to put his finger on the essential faults, on that self-esteem which *would take all upon itself*, on that slavery to consideration, on that ambition to appear perfect in the eyes of the good—in short, all that formed the foundation of that cautious and vain-glorious nature. There is besides, in Fénelon's *Spiritual Letters*, regarded as a whole, a certain diversity which makes him appear to adapt himself to persons, and this diversity must have been especially present in his conversation. The *Entretiens* which Ramsay has handed down to us, and in which Fénelon unfolded to him the reasons which, in his opinion, should triumphantly bring every deist to the Catholic faith, are of a breadth, a simple beauty, a full and luminous eloquence which leave nothing to be desired. Just as the Conversation, which has been preserved, between Pascal and M. de Saci is one of the finest testimonies to Pascal's intellect, so these Conversations, handed down by Ramsay, give us the loftiest idea of Fénelon's manner, and in breadth of tone surpass even most of his letters.

The most interesting portion of the volume just published consists of a set of familiar letters from Fénelon to, one of his friends, a soldier of merit, the Chevalier Destouches. All the distinguished persons who passed through Cambrai (and almost the whole army passed through at every campaign, during those wars of Louis XIV's last years) saw Fénelon, were entertained by him; and, with that particular attraction which was his, more than one of these passing acquaintances became a permanent friend. His intimacy with the Chevalier Destouches was one of the closest and tenderest. Destouches, then forty-three years of age, was serving in the artillery and with distinction; he was a man of wit and culture,

and was very fond of Virgil. At the same time he was dissipated, addicted to pleasures, those of the table, which were not the only ones; and we are obliged to admit that his intercourse with Fénelon never thoroughly converted him, since it is he who passes for the father of d'Alembert, who was born to Mme. de Tencin in 1717. Be that as it may, Fénelon loved him, and that alone redeemed all. The amiable prelate tells him so in every tone, with scoldings and lecturings, though he saw well that he had little success:

'If you were to show my letter to some grave and severe censor, he wrote to him one day (April, 1714), he would not fail to say: Why is that old bishop (Fénelon was then sixty-three) so fond of such a profane man? That is a great scandal, I admit; but how can I correct myself? The truth is, that I find two men in you; you are double like Sosia, without any duplicity or cunning; on the one hand you are wicked for yourself; for your friends, on the other hand, you are true, upright, noble, devoted. I finish up with an act of protest taken from your friend Pliny the Younger: *Neque enim amore decipior . . .*'

That is to say: 'Affection does not blind me, it is true that I love with effusion, but I criticize, and that with a penetration in proportion to my love'.

This Correspondence of Fénelon with the Chevalier Destouches shows us the prelate even in those sad years (1711-1714), sometimes unbending in innocent banter and, like Lælius and Scipio, playing after undoing his belt. He would seem to have set himself a wager in this Correspondence, to have said to his somewhat libertine friend: 'You love Virgil, you are fond of quoting him; well! I refer you to Horace, I require no other auxiliary beside him to vanquish you, and I undertake to inculcate into you almost all the Christian counsels which you need, or at least all counsels useful in life, and to disguise them under lines of Horace'. Horace, in fact, crops up in every line of the letters, and he speaks as often as Fénelon. These letters give us a perfect idea of what his conversations might have been, the charming and distinguished talk, in the pleasant hours of gaiety and playfulness; his *table-talk* and after-dinner conversation, the most cheerful imaginable in the moderate tone. In it we may catch, as if we had been present, the

habits of thought and feeling, and the well-balanced tone of that refined nature. Destouches had sent the prelate a few Latin epitaphs: 'The epitaphs, replies Fénelon, have much power, every line is an epigram; they are historical and curious. Those who composed them were very witty, but they forced their wit; wit should be inadvertent and unconscious. They are written in the spirit of Tacitus, *who plunges into evil*'. Further on, after quoting some lines of Horace on peace, Fénelon happens to recall a stanza of Malherbe: 'There you have the ancient poet, he says, who is simple, graceful, exquisite; here the modern, *who has his beauty*'. How well expressed! how well the proportion, the shade of colouring, between the modern and the ancient is observed, and how well he makes us feel that he prefers the ancient! These plays of wit are crossed by serious and pathetic touches. The year 1711 was a great year for Fénelon. The first Dauphin died on April 14, and the Duke of Burgundy became next, and to all appearance a very near, heir to the throne. One might say that, from the depths of his exile at Cambrai, Fénelon received the full sun's ray, and was already reigning by the side of his royal pupil. Consulted by letter on every political and ecclesiastical matter, a very authoritative secret arbiter in the Jansenistic quarrels, restored to the dignity of a doctor and oracle, he was already playing the great rôle in his turn. But suddenly misfortunes break over him: the Duchess of Burgundy dies on February 12, 1712; the Duke follows her on the 18th, six days later, at the age of twenty-nine; and all the hopes, all the affections, shall we dare to say all the secret ambitions of the prelate, vanish. We see a trace of his deep grief even in this playful Correspondence; but how simple the words, how true, and how they repel every ill-natured thought! On hearing of the princess' death, which preceded that of his pupil by so short a time, Fénelon wrote to Destouches (February 18):

'The sad news which have come to us from the country where you are, Sir, take from me all the joy which was the soul of our intercourse: *Quis desiderio sit pudor*. . . . Truly it is a very great loss for the Court and the whole kingdom. A thousand good things were told of the princess, and they increased every day. One must feel very anxious for those who mourn her with

so just a grief. (*What a delicate manner of indicating his fears for the Duke of Burgundy !*) You see how frail this life is. Four days ; they are not sure ! Everybody pretends to understand, as if he were immortal ; the world is but a rout of living people, weak, false and ready to decay ; the most brilliant fortune is but a flattering dream'.

Those are not the grand accents, the wide beats of Bossuet's wings as he exclaims from the height of his pulpit : *Madame is dying ! Madame is dead !* But with less brilliance and thunder, is that not as eloquent and as penetrating ?

On hearing of the Duke of Burgundy's death, Fénelon has but one word ; it is brief and keenly felt, it is what we should have expected : ' I suffer, God knows ; but I did not fall ill, and that is much for me. Your heart, which sympathizes with mine, comforts it. I should have been keenly pained to see you here ; think of your poor health ; *it seems to me that all I love is dying*'. To write thus to the Chevalier Destouches, in such a moment of grief, was to place him very high.

The worldly counter-blow of this cruel loss is quickly felt by Fénelon. Yesterday he was the man of the future reign and of coming hopes ; to-day, he is nothing, his dream is shattered, and if he was able to forget it for a single moment, the world is there at once to remind him of it. A man of some importance, a friend of Destouches, had offered his daughter in marriage to one of Fénelon's nephews ; the day after the death of the Duke of Burgundy, this man goes back from his word and withdraws his promise. Fénelon is not astonished ; he does not blame that father who is anxious to see his daughter well settled ; he commends him and even thanks him for his plain dealing :

' As for your friend, he writes to Destouches, I entreat you not to feel any ill-will towards him for his fickleness ; his wrong consists at the most in having set his hope upon a frail and uncertain support ; it is upon these sorts of uncertain hopes that the worldly-wise are wont to build their plans. If we did not overlook such things we should become misanthropic ; we should avoid such rocks for ourselves in life, and easily overlook them in our neighbours'.

An admirable and serene, or at least a tranquil disposition, which shows through in more than one part of

this Correspondence! Fénelon thoroughly knows the world of men, he has no illusions about them. Had a delicate heart like his anything more to learn in the way of disappointments and bitterness? But he is not therefore a misanthrope; and if he ever was, he must have had a way of being so which was like no other:

'I am very glad, my dear bonhomme, he writes to Destouches, that you are pleased with one of my letters which was given you to read. You are right when you say and believe that I expect little of most men; I try to give much, and to expect nothing. I come out of this bargain very well; on these conditions, I defy them to deceive me. There is only a very small number of friends upon whom I count, not from self-interest, but from pure esteem; not in order to try to gain anything from them, but to do them justice by not mistrusting their hearts. I should like to oblige the whole human race, and especially the honest; but there is hardly anybody to whom I should care to be under obligation. Is it arrogance or pride that makes me feel thus? Nothing could be more foolish or out of place; but I have learnt to know men as I grow older, and I think the best thing is to be independent of them without pretending to cleverness'.—'I pity men, he says again, although they are not often good'.

This scarcity of good people, which appears to him *the shame of the human race*, led him to love all the more the friends he had chosen: 'Comparison makes us only too sensible of the value of true, gentle, reliable, reasonable people, who are capable of friendship, and above all motives of interest'. On one single occasion he betrayed a curiosity of mind, that was for Prince Eugène, in whom he thought he perceived a truly great man. He confesses that he would be curious to know and observe him:

'His feats of war are great; but what I esteem most in him' are those qualities in which what is called fortune has no share. It is asserted that he is sincere without any ostentation, without any arrogance, ready to listen without any prejudice, and to reply in precise terms. At times he withdraws from company to read; he loves merit, he adapts himself to all nations; he inspires confidence: that is the man you are going to see. I should also like to see him in our Low Countries; I confess to a curiosity with regard to him, though I have little left for the human race'.

The death of the Duc de Beauvilliers (August 31, 1714)

broke the last close ties which attached Fénelon to the future: 'True friends, he wrote on this occasion to Destouches, cause all the sweetness and all the bitterness of life'. To Destouches too he wrote that admirable letter, already cited by M. de Bausset, in which he said how desirable it would be 'if all good friends agreed to die together on the same day', and he cites the case of Philemon and Baucis; which shows that it is true, and that we did not dream it, that there is a real relation between Fénelon's soul and La Fontaine's.

I have sufficiently indicated the interest of these new letters. We might find in them some additional details on Fénelon's last year (1714). The peace which had just been signed laid new duties upon him:

'The end of your labours, he wrote to Destouches, is the beginning of mine; the peace which gives you back your liberty robs me of mine; I have seven hundred and sixty-four villages to visit. You will not be surprised that I should wish to do my duty, having seen you so scrupulous in the execution of yours, in spite of your maladies and your wound'.

Six weeks before his death, on one of his pastoral rounds, he was thrown out of his coach and nearly killed; he tells of it in a very amusing manner:

'A rather long absence has delayed the replies I owe you. It is true, dear man, that I was in the greatest danger of losing my life; I am still unable to understand how I escaped: no one ever lost three horses with greater luck. My men all shouted to me: *All is lost; save yourself*; I did not hear them, the windows being raised. I was reading a book, with my spectacles on my nose, my pencil in my hand, and my legs in a bear-skin sack: almost like Archimedes when he perished at the taking of Syracuse. A vain comparison, but a frightful accident'.

And he enters into the details of the accident: a mill-wheel suddenly beginning to turn at the side of a bridge without a parapet, one of the horses takes fright, runs away, and so on. To the last, in spite of his inward grief, though his heart was still sick from the loss of his cherished pupil, Fénelon could still smile, and without too much effort. He had that light-hearted cheerfulness which is neither a dissipation nor a lie, and which with him was but the natural movement of a chaste, equable, temperate soul; his joy was that of which, as he said

so truly, 'frugality, health and innocence are the true sources'. In his last letter of December 1, 1714 (that is to say, a month before falling into his last illness), he still bantered Destouches on the *pretty* repasts to which the Chevalier was addicted, at the risk of repentance: 'It is at Cambrai, he says, that one is sober, healthy, light-hearted, contented and cheerful with regularity'. The general tone of these pleasant letters is shown in these very words. When I read this familiar correspondence, I find, as I do in all Fénelon, something gay, brief, vivacious, deliberate, easy, insinuating and fascinating.

Among the pleasantries we meet with in these letters are some which have reference to the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, which was then burning in the very heart of the Academy and which flared up more brightly than ever at the very moment when peace was being signed in Europe. La Motte, a friend of the Chevalier Destouches, had just translated, travestied, Homer's *Iliad*, and he sent it to Fénelon, asking his opinion. Fénelon was on this occasion a little weak. Called upon to be judge and arbiter between the two parts, he shuffled. He thought that in a matter which did not interest the safety of the State, he might be a little more accommodating than in others, and incline towards politeness. He replied to La Motte with compliments and praises, unwilling to pronounce on the matter in question; he got out of the difficulty by quoting a line of Virgil, which leaves the victory undecided between two shepherds: *Et vitulâ tu dignus, et hic. . .* The victory undecided between La Motte and Homer! And this is Fénelon, the translator, the continuer of the *Odyssey*, the father of *Télémaque*, who speaks thus! Is it possible to carry tolerance so far? Evidently Fénelon had none of that irritability of good sense and reason which makes one reply with a forcible No, that honest and hasty, even a little blunt power, which Despréaux carried into literature, and Bossuet into theology. Here again we find a weak side.

To every man his glory and his shadows. We may catch Fénelon at fault on certain points. Bossuet drove him hard in theology. I find that he is also refuted and vigorously rated, apropos of his *Dialogues on Elo-*



quence and a few ventured assertions on the ancient orators, by Gibert, a man of learning, an austere and by no means contemptible mind, who was likewise an adversary of Rollin. But what matter to-day a few inaccuracies? Fénelon had the spirit of piety, and he had the spirit of antiquity. He unites in himself these two spirits, or rather he possesses and contains them each in its sphere, without any strife or struggle, without setting them by the ears, without any hint of discord, and that is a great charm. For him, the opposition between Christianity and Greece does not exist, and *Télémaque* is the unique monument of that happy and almost impossible harmony.

The *Télémaque* (how can we refrain from saying a word of it when speaking of Fénelon?) is not pure antique. Pure antique nowadays would be more or less imitation and pasticcio. We have had, since that work, some striking models of that antique studied and remade with passion and learning. The *Télémaque* is another thing, something much more artless and more original in its very imitation. It is the antique regressed naturally and without an effort by a modern genius, by a Christian heart, which, fed on Homer's speech, recalls it freely to mind and draws from it as from the source; but he insensibly remakes and transforms it in proportion as he recalls it to mind. This beauty thus deviated, softened down without being impaired, flows in Fénelon in full channels, and overflows like an abundant and easy fountain, an ever-sacred fountain, which adapts itself to its new slope and its new banks. To properly appreciate *Télémaque*, there is only one thing to be done; forget, if you can, that you have read it too much in your childhood. I had this happiness last year; I had almost forgotten *Télémaque*, and I was able to reread it with the freshness of novelty.

From the literary side many have praised and many have tried to define Fénelon, but never, in my opinion, with a happier sensibility of expression and a more touching resemblance than in the following passage, where both his style and his person are discussed: 'What he made us feel was not ecstasies, but a succession of peaceable and inexpressible sentiments: there was in his language I know not what tranquil harmony, what sweet

deliberation, what lingering charm that no words can render'. It is Chactas who says this in *Les Natchez*. It is rather strange that such words should be found in the mouth of an American Indian, but they are none the less beautiful and perfect, and worthy to be inscribed after the pages of Fénelon.

## BARNAVE<sup>1</sup>

*Monday, April 7, 1850.*

It was in 1843—that is to say, just fifty years after Barnave's death—that his very authentic works appeared, collected by the piety of one of his sisters, Mme. de Saint-Germain, assisted by M. Béranger. Barnave was previously known only as an orator; but the orator, ever performing and on the stage, does not sufficiently allow the man to show through. In these works, on the other hand, it is the man that we are enabled to see, the nature and quality of the mind still more than of the talent, the moral person. Barnave, having returned to his home in January, 1792, after the closing of the Constituent Assembly, placed under arrest in September of the same year, detained for more than a year before perishing on the scaffold, took advantage of that interval to write reflections of every kind upon the subjects that habitually occupied his mind. These political and other thoughts, by reason of their serious and truthful character, the absence of all declamation, the sincerity of his confessions and his noble remorse for faults committed, of his sage views with regard to the future mingled with criticism of the present, are greatly to Barnave's honour, and cannot but confirm and clear up the impression of interest and esteem which remains attached to his memory. I do not think that sufficient attention was paid to these volumes at the time they appeared, and that is an omission that should be repaired.

Barnave was twenty-seven years of age when he was elected a member of the States-General, and he died at thirty-two. From the very beginning he distinguished

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Barnave.* Published by M. Béranger (of La Drôme). (4 vols.)

himself in the Assembly by the clearness of his intellect and his speech, and he took his place with general favour. In consequence of an unfortunate speech which inadvertently escaped him, and to which we shall return, he became more of a party man than he should have done. He quickly gained in authority in spite of his youth, and grew in power of debating; he was a man to be reckoned with in all important deliberations. Once or twice he appeared to disconcert Mirabeau, and he had the honour of holding him in check. His chief talent lay in argument; he was wont to intervene towards the end of a debate and possessed the art of clearing it up, of summing it up. Mme. de Staël remarked that by his talent he was better adapted than any other deputy to make a speaker in the English sense, that is to say, a speaker who could reason and debate. His nerve, his vigour, his noble sentiments, which were not simulated, preserved him from the disadvantage which his enemies might have reproached him with, which Mme. Roland does reproach him with, which was a slight coldness. There were speakers in the Constituent Assembly who had more power, more impetuosity, more thunder, and gave the impression of a grander eloquence; there was none perhaps who had in a higher degree than he 'facility in debating, in connecting his ideas, in speaking on the question without having previously written his speech'. If we should be called upon to name at this distance, amongst the members of that great Assembly, the orator who was the most faithful representative of it from the first to the last day, in the constancy and continuity of its spirit, in its capacity, its brilliance, in its faults, in its integrity too and in the work of its sane majority, it is not Mirabeau, who was too great, too corrupt, carried away too soon, that we should choose, nor Maury, the Mirabeau of the minority, nor La Fayette, who had too little eloquence, nor any other; for the combination of qualities which best express the physiognomy of the Constituent Assembly, it is Barnave, the young deputy of the Dauphiné, that we should choose.

He was born at Grenoble, on October 22, 1761; his father was a respected lawyer, his mother beautiful and dignified. His parents professed the reformed religion; but he does not at any time seem to have gained from it

anything but a certain thoughtful and serious habit of mind. He was brought up in austerity and the home affections, in the midst of that honest and vigorous middle class, of which he will soon be the champion and avenger. A rather striking incident must have acted upon his mind in early childhood. One day his mother took him to the theatre; there was only one box vacant, and she took her seat in it. But this box had been reserved for one of the toadies of the Duc de Tonnerre, the Governor of the province, and first the manager, then the officer on guard came and entreated Mme. Barnave to retire. She refused and, by order of the Governor, four fusiliers came upon the scene to back up their persuasions. The pit was already taking sides, and a collision was to be feared, when M. Barnave, informed of the insult done to his wife, appeared and took her away, saying: 'I leave by order of the Governor'. The whole public, the whole middle-class community resented this insult done to the Barnaves and loudly testified their resentment. They pledged themselves not to enter the theatre again until satisfaction had been given, and they kept their word in fact for several months, until Mme. Barnave consented to reappear. The impression of this insult must have reacted upon the precocious mind of the young Barnave: there is no surer way of appreciating an injustice, a general inequality, than to be directly affected by it, either in one's own person or that of one's people. As soon as he saw his way, Barnave took an oath 'to raise *the cast to which he belonged* (that is his expression) from the state of humiliation to which it seemed to be condemned'.

Proud, ardent, impatient of injustice, deeply animated by a sense of human dignity, we soon see him reacting upon himself, laying down rules of conduct and study, analysing himself, joining reflection and method to his first impulses. He is fond of committing all his ideas to paper. At sixteen he fights a duel for his younger brother, who had been insulted, he is wounded a few lines from the heart. At seventeen he prefers to associate only with people older than himself; though physically favoured and possessed of natural elegance, he has a predilection for serious conversation. With a strong bent for literature, he is able to constrain himself and

vigorously to apply himself to the study of the Law, in deference to his father. If the latter's austerity kept him a little at a distance, he found opportunities for expansion and cheerful relaxation in company of his mother and his younger brother and sisters. But there, too, the habit of his mind reveals its serious turn. We see him giving his young sisters charming pieces of advice, the justness of which was seasoned by gaiety. He early loses that younger brother for whom he had fought, and who promised to distinguish himself in the exact sciences. He mourns him, he gives expression to his grief in a few sincere and touching pages quite in the antique manner:

'Thou wast, he exclaims, one of those whom I separated from the world, and I had placed thee very near my heart. Alas! thou art no more than a memory, a fugitive thought: the falling leaf and the impalpable shadow are less ethereal than thou'.

It is remarkable how, in more than one passage, the idea of a future existence is almost naturally absent from Barnave's supposition:

'But, O dear image! he continues, no, thou wilt never be for thy brother an extinct and unreal being: often present in my thought, thou dost enliven my solitude. . . . When a sweet thought moves me, I call thee to share my enjoyment. I call thee especially when my heart meditates an honest project, and when I see thy countenance smile I taste the reward of it with greater delight. Often thou directest the thoughts which animate my dreams before slumber. I do not hide myself from thee, but it is very true that, when my soul is occupied with its weaknesses, I do not try to call thee. Then I do not see thee smile. Oh! thy fair face is a surer guide than the morality of men'.

There is another touching passage on his mother, recorded on the day after this cruel loss. If Barnave ever attained what one might call poetic sentiment or expression (a very rare accident with him), it was on that day of emotion. I must quote this felicitous page, which gives him a place between Vauvenargues and André Chénier, his natural brothers, who died at the same age, whom we like to associate with him in respect of talent and heart as well as destiny.

## ON HIS MOTHER

*(After the death of his brother).*

'She rose sick at heart; we all came down to breakfast; she, too, came a few moments after, but she would take nothing; this grieved us all.

'As she had an internal pain I offered her some coffee, which she took. During the rest of the day she was better, but very melancholy. Delicate and tender as she is, very little will grieve her heart and arouse her emotions.

'The noon-day wind was blowing; all day it stirred the trees under the windows and brought down the last leaves of the year'.

How well this noon-day wind, which blows and makes the last leaves to fall, is brought in by a delicate and touching harmony!

'In the evening, at the end of the day's work, we went for a walk, she, Adelaide, and I. As we walked, we sang tender and melancholy airs; we spoke of Saint-Huberti's talents. The evening, the wind, the clouds, the falling leaves, spoke a language that went to the heart. We were touched, and by degrees silence succeeded to conversation.—This wind saddens me, she said at one time.—A moment after, I spoke to her, and she did not reply; she was oppressed; she remained so for some time, in spite of our words and caresses, to which she could not respond. At last, the testimony of our affection calmed a little the violence of her state; we succeeded in moving her. She spoke of my brother with pain, her head dropping on my shoulder; her highly strung nerves relaxed; she sobbed; tears came, and she felt soothed. The sympathy of our hearts calmed hers; I pointed out to her that our Du Gua (that was the name of his brother) was happier than we, happy, if our hearts were known to him, on account of all the traces he had left in them. We promised to endeavour all our lives to comfort each other for our loss. Her tears flowed more freely; she became tranquil. But, during the remainder of the walk, we could not speak any more, and were all occupied with the subject of her grief'.

In this intelligent and patriotic province of the Dauphiné, Barnave's serious youth found subjects for inspiration and exercise; his political life began prematurely. The Dauphiné, he has remarked, distinguished itself early, in the resistance of the other provinces, by a *bold and methodic* progress; that, too, is the double character of the whole of Barnave's career. When

devoting himself to the study of Law, he felt at first urged not so much to the civil as to the political branch ; he read eagerly, he earnestly searched and absorbed all the French works on these matters of government and institutions. In 1783, when he was twenty-two years of age, he delivered, at the close of the sittings of the Parliament, a discourse *On the Necessity of the Division of Powers in the Political Body*. When the disturbances of the Dauphiné occurred, the regular insurrection against the Edicts and the spontaneous convocation of the States of that province, which had its own premature revolution, he was quite ready ; he was amongst the first to give the signal by a courageous and opportune work. He bore his first arms under the worthy Mounier, and was deservedly borne at his side, and by the same votes, to the States-General.

He relates in simple and truthful terms his first impressions and his state of mind on his arrival at Versailles : ' My personal position in these first moments, he says, resembled that of no other : too young to harbour the idea of controlling so imposing an Assembly, this situation also brought assurance to all those who had any claims to become leaders ; none saw in me a rival, every one might see in me a disciple or a useful follower '. He began already to exercise some ascendancy by the clearness of his opinions and the energy of his speech. The leaders welcomed him with good-will ; and he, with that confident illusion that no noble youth escapes, tried at first to exercise that sort of influence which they appeared to allow him, with a view of uniting them : ' Thus, he said, I made vain efforts to reconcile Mounier and the Abbé Sieyès, an undertaking very worthy of a young man in respect of those imperious men, who had come to assert opposite systems '.

He quickly formed himself and decided upon the line he was to follow. He had at first been regarded as Mounier's *aide-de-camp*, and he did what was necessary to shake himself free and appear independent. According to him, ' Mounier and his partizans appeared to be unaware that there was a revolution ; they tried to build the edifice with broken materials '. This group of honourable but stubborn men soon met with insurmountable obstacles, and they abdicated. Outside of their party, three systems



were henceforth face to face : the first aimed at regenerating the monarchical power by changing the person of the monarch : that was the secret thought of the Orleans party. The second system, which joined as yet only a small number of adepts, aimed already at substituting a republican government for the monarchical power. Lastly, the third system, which was that of the majority, consisted in preserving both the throne and the actual occupier of it, and 'in renovating all the other parts by using them so to say as an under-pinning, and placing them behind the shelter of this principal building'. To this latter party Barnave frankly rallied, without any reserve ; but his progress was not free from temptations, deviations and errors. From the first months he allied himself with Duport and the Lameths, and this close connexion endured to the last without any weakening. He calls these friends of his choice, to whom he remained ever faithful, 'men *full of faults*, but of probity, character and courage'. That is the way he speaks of them in the writings intended solely for his own perusal ; he spoke of them in the same way before his accusers and in face of the scaffold : this double judgment is too much in harmony not to be sincerely his. I have said that an unfortunate speech uttered almost at the beginning of his career altered his situation in the Assembly and impaired the purity of his character. It is that speech which escaped him in the sitting of July 23, 1789, on the occasion of the murders of Foulon and Bertier, out of which Lally-Tolendal made political capital by denouncing it : 'Was the blood that was shed then so pure' ? That is the famous word, the fatal and inexcusable word which escaped from Barnave, and which, if taken by itself, if closely examined in every sense, as was done by his enemies, would strangely calumniate his instincts and his heart. 'All those with whom I have lived, he said, have seen, by my actions and my words, that I considered elevation of character to consist especially of these two things, *frankness* and *moderation* ; and if, in the course of the Revolution, I have sometimes neglected the latter, I declare that then I only ceased to be myself'. After regretting this hasty expression, he adds these sincere words :

'But here, with the same truth, I will relate what passed within me, and how those words were forced from me.

'I have always regarded as one of the chief qualities of a man the power of keeping a cool head at the moment of danger, and I have even a certain contempt for those who give way to tears when it is necessary to act. But this contempt, I confess, changes to profound indignation when I think I perceive a display of sensibility which is merely a stage trick.

'Here are the facts:

'Before this event was spoken of in the Assembly, Desmeuniers showed me a letter which informed him of it. I was strongly moved, and I assured him that I understood like himself the necessity of putting an end to such disorders.

'A moment after, M. de Lally uttered his denunciation. We might have expected him to speak of Foulon and Bertier, of the state of Paris, of the necessity of repressing murders. No; he spoke of himself, of his sensibility, of his father; he ended by proposing a proclamation.

'Then I rose. I confess that my muscles were contracted. . . .

We think we can see the situation, the attitude and the gestures on both sides: on the one side, M. de Lally, who has been called the fattest, the gayest, the most gourmand of men of feeling, that witty and demonstrative personage, who on account of a moment of generous eloquence and pathos in his youth was privileged to be a declaimer all his life, possessing the fine gift of tears and making use of it on this, as on all occasions; on the other hand, a young, ardent, rather bitter man, angry at seeing a display of humanity becoming an oratorical machine and a stroke of tactics; imagine the two men face to face, and all will be explained. But the speech was none the less very awkward for Barnave. It required his whole life and especially his death to redeem it. We will only add that the excessive severity with which, in peaceful times, and from their comfortable arm-chairs, many have been led to judge such accidents, would only prove that they might say worse things themselves in a time of tumult and when occasion offered.

Barnave's public life is well known, and we are not going to dwell here upon the succession of labours and memorable acts of which it is made up. In the pages of reflections and lofty considerations which he wrote in retirement and during his imprisonment in 1792, we must do him this justice, that he speaks above all of general subjects and events, and very little about himself. When he does speak of himself it is generally to add a few con-

fessions which are calculated to touch. He confesses that a love of popularity was long his weak point and his idol, and that, if for a moment he deviated from his straight course, he soon came back to it when he saw there was a danger of losing sight of it :

‘ As soon as a weak man, he remarked, feels that popularity is escaping from him he makes a thousand efforts to keep hold of it, and that is ordinarily the moment when one is most unfaithful to one’s opinion, and liable to be carried away to the most foolish and disastrous extravagances.—For a man of character, the opposite error would be most to be feared, and, as the former would yield to cowardice, the latter would be inclined to give way to rancour ’.

This man of character was himself, and he, too, was at one time the weak man. Let us hear these noble confessions :

‘ I felt the first disposition (that of weakness) at the beginning of 1791, and the second (that of rancour) in the same year after the affair of the Colonies. I kept such a guard over myself, that I do not think I swerved from my natural course ; but the second time, if I had not imposed upon myself an almost complete silence for a fortnight, I might in a moment of heat have done myself a real and irreparable wrong ’.

In another place he admits more explicitly having deviated from his course, when, having again become a regular attendant at the public sittings of the Assembly, from which his work in Committees had obliged him to absent himself, he observed that his popularity had notably diminished, and that outside attacks had done their work. This kind of disfavour, quite novel for him, found him singularly vulnerable : ‘ This period of my public life is the only one, he confesses, in which I was not entirely myself ; one mistake dragged me into another ’. And he enumerates them. We recommend the reading of these pages to those who are loyally entering the public career, and who neither wish to flatter the idol of ruling public opinion, nor (what is another caprice) assume the part of braving it.

Barnave gives us the following little list, which is curious as offering a sort of statistics or scale of popularity in this first revolutionary period :

‘ Necker was the first who in our time, in France, enjoyed

what is called popularity.—It attached itself to La Fayette, at the time of the creation of the National Guard. Soon after, Mirabeau shared it with him; but Mirabeau's popularity, like that of M. d'Orléans, was always accompanied by a great deal of distrust. Charles Lameth and I then had it, a little diminished, however, because La Fayette still kept a large number of partizans.—We lost it during the affair of the Colonies, but the scoundrel who robbed us of it (*he is less angry with Brissot in other places*) could not win it, because the people, thoughtless though they are, have yet a tact which cannot be taken in by this cunning hypocrisy; it went then to Robespierre, but so diminished that one may say that he did not perhaps win the fourth part of our partizans'.

Yes, it went to Robespierre diminished in number and extent, but increased in intensity and carried to the point of fanaticism, which made it more real and more formidable.

Barnave's popularity was as yet only partially impaired, when he was chosen with La Tour-Maubourg and Pétion, as a delegate of the Assembly, to bring back the fugitive Louis XVI to Paris, after his arrest at Varennes. On this subject many suppositions and much romance have been written; nothing can be simpler and clearer than Barnave's conduct. It is directly attested by himself, and not less directly by the reliable enough testimony of Pétion. The latter, indeed, wrote an account of this return from Varennes which is still in manuscript, and of which I have been allowed to read a copy in the study of the former and still gracious Chancellor of France, M. Pasquier. Pétion's account does as much honour to Barnave as it does little to the narrator himself and, through a strange oversight, the speaker does not seem to have any suspicion of it. In presence of these great and touching misfortunes, Pétion seems taken up with one thing only, the respect of his own virtue, with the design he supposes all the world to be harbouring to catch it at fault and to corrupt it, with his anxiety to preserve and assert it. There are some silly portions and others which might seem worse. Nothing could equal the vulgarity of the tone, unless it be that of the sentiments. With regard to Barnave and Maubourg, of whom he is very distrustful, this very distrust does them justice; he testifies to what extent, in this circumstance, they were prepared to feel differently from self.

'For a long time, says Pétion at the beginning of his story I had had no connexion with Barnave; I had never associated with Maubourg. Maubourg knew Mine de Tourzel (governess to the children of France) very well, and one cannot conceal the fact that Barnave had already conceived some plans. They thought it very politic to shelter behind a man who was known to be an enemy of all intrigue, and a lover of good morals and virtue'.

Leaving morals and virtue aside, this testimony has some value. It is very important indeed for historical truth to acknowledge that what has been called Barnave's change does not date from this journey, is not the result of a simple emotion, very conceivable by the way and very natural, but of a previous and reasoned modification of views and principles. The impressions of the time only assisted and confirmed it. With regard to the journey itself, the precisest and most circumstantial details have shown that at no moment could any private conversation have taken place between the Queen and Barnave. Pétion and Barnave, who were inside the royal coach, were always together:

'We arrived unexpectedly at Dormans, writes Pétion; I several times observed Barnave (who was seated opposite to him, between the King and the Queen), and though the dim light did not permit me to distinguish with great accuracy, his bearing towards the Queen appeared to me honest, reserved, and the conversation had no appearance of mystery'.

*And a little farther, on leaving La Ferté-sous-Jouarre:*

'Barnave talked for a moment with the Queen, but it seemed to me in a rather indifferent manner'.

What was quite natural and inevitable was that the Queen, like the woman she was, immediately recognized in Barnave the attitude, the tone, the consideration of what will always be called in France a gentleman (*homme comme il faut*); she felt herself to be the object of a respectful and discreet pity; she understood that she could, to a certain extent, depend upon him. Barnave, on his part, reviewing in his prison the memories of this epoch, was able to say of so touching a conjuncture, 'that by engraving on his imagination this memorable example of misfortune, it had no doubt helped him to easily support his own'.

The impression was besides not limited to a mere moral disposition; the effect was seen in some of his more conspicuous political acts. Barnave's first great speech in the Assembly, on the very question which this flight had raised, on the royal inviolability which had been called into question, may be regarded as his finest triumph, though an ephemeral triumph. He rises to a height of political views and eloquence which he had never yet attained, and one might have thought him inspired by the genius of Mirabeau. In this disastrous circumstance he tries to revive, to restore in all its integrity that so compromised ideal of the inviolability and impeccability of the constitutional king, which the impetuosity of the French spirit has never been able to accept or to imagine, but which it was honourable to offer it. Over this fallen and humiliated King he tries to throw the sheltering cloak of theory and the law, and he did so with a breadth, a dignity, a warmth of impulse which called forth almost unanimous applause. It was then that, wishing to point out all the danger there lay for liberty itself in making the monarch personally responsible to such a degree either in good or evil, he exclaimed: 'To those who cry out so furiously against the individual who has sinned, I will say: *You would be at his feet, I suppose, if you were satisfied with him!*'

Mirabeau one day said to Barnave, to signify that his oratorical talent was not genius: 'There is no divinity in thee!' If Barnave ever belied Mirabeau's words, it was on that day.

In the last part of this discourse, leaving the details of the recriminations, deprecating all middle courses and taking the facts in the mass, he scanned the future in all its extent, he said: 'Every change is to-day fatal; every prolongation of the Revolution is to-day disastrous. I put the question here, and here it is marked by the national interest. Shall we end the Revolution? shall we recommence it?' The speech, read to-day, has something prophetic; the sensation it caused was profound at the time; Barnave gained his case in the Assembly, but it was already lost outside.

And not only in the speaker's tribune did he henceforth become the man of the constitutional monarchy; it appears certain that after the return from Varennes,

Barnave, in one way or another, accepted and kept up connexion with the Court, and that he gave advice more or less directly. Mme. Campan's story, though inaccurate on several points and betraying throughout a slightly romantic colouring which is not becoming to Barnave, seems to admit of no doubt on that point. In the works of Barnave we have before us, which were written during his imprisonment, it is not astonishing that we should see no mention or trace of those secret relations, the mere suspicion of which soon sufficed to cause his ruin. It is really puzzling, however, to hear Barnave, in his Defence before the Revolutionary Tribunal, expressing himself in these terms: 'I bear witness, on my life, that I have never, absolutely never, had the slightest correspondence with the Castle; that I have never, absolutely never, set foot in the Castle'. That is explicit. Such a declaration, in face of Mme. Campan's story, cannot, I repeat, fail to really puzzle and perplex us; for one hesitates to admit that Barnave spoke here simply as an advocate who thinks himself entitled to deny everything that is not proved. But whilst hesitating to do so from respect for his moral character, one is at a loss to find any other explanation. It is to be regretted that M. Béranger, in the estimable and interesting Notice he has placed at the head of the present volumes, has not approached and discussed this delicate point, so as to decisively settle it; it is an unfortunate gap in a work which might otherwise pass for definitive. If we had not this definite and perplexing denial from the lips of Barnave, we should have no other reason for disguising what, after all, would have been honourable and avowable. Barnave was not, and never gave himself out as a republican: he was a constitutional royalist who, even in secret, can never have offered any advice except in that direction. But he believed little in the efficacy of his words; he left Paris before the period indicated by Mme. Campan; he was no longer there in the first days of January, 1792, having returned to his domestic hearth. His letters to the Lameths, written at this date, show clearly enough what should be the sense and the nature of the only counsels he was capable of giving.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I refer the reader to the end of the article for a few details I have received on Barnave's relations with the Court.

Barnave quickly came to maturity. His criticisms on the last acts of the Constituent Assembly display much wisdom. He discerns and shows up distinctly the supreme faults committed by that great Assembly, just as he disclosed, by the way, his own. By forbidding its members an entry into the next legislature and declaring them excluded from all offices in the gift of the King, the Constituent Assembly prolonged and reopened the Revolution, at the very moment when it declared it closed. It arbitrarily hurried the conclusion, and substituted a theatrical dénouement for a true political solution. In cutting off all communication between itself and its successors, it acted just as if it had wished to notify them to begin all over again; they were in any case quite disposed to do so. From that moment the fate of the Revolution, already so hazardous, was rendered entirely doubtful. They had missed the port, and had to make a double crossing: 'It is no longer the voyage to America, said Barnave ingeniously, but the voyage to India'. He did not conclude, however, that they should be discouraged or despair, and he wrote from Grenoble to one of the Lameths (March 31, 1792): 'Men who have *excessively* desired a revolution cannot, when halfway, lack head or courage'.

This noble feeling of devotion and faith in his cause never forsook him, in spite of disappointments and ingratitude; he has expressed it on a noble page which sums up his final examination of his conscience in politics:

'(1792.) What an immense space we have traversed in these three years, and yet we cannot flatter ourselves on having arrived at the term!

'We have stirred up the earth *very deeply*, we have found a fertile and virgin soil; but what corrupt exhalations have risen from it! How much intelligence in individuals, how much courage in the mass; but how little real character, how little calm strength, and, above all, how little true virtue!

'Arrived at my home, I ask myself whether it would not have been better never to have left it; and I need a little reflection to reply, so greatly does the situation in which this new Assembly has placed us cast down our courage and energy.

'However, after a little reflection, one is convinced that, whatever may happen, we cannot cease to be free, and that the chief errors we have destroyed will never reappear. How many misfortunes should we suffer to make us forget such advantages!'



This must have been written soon after his return to Grenoble. His imprisonment hardly changed this disposition of mind. Detained for more than a year in the Dauphiné, the numerous writings with which he filled the long hours of reflection and solitude are stamped with the same character : maturity, wisdom, elevation, no feeling of exasperation or hatred, nothing personal. I will not maintain that all his ideas appear to me equally clear, free and timely ; there are some which are evidently only tentative. There is much that is hazardous in his literary views, and still more in his physiological ideas ; there is much feeling of his way, even in his political considerations, when he goes outside of that which he knows best, and when, looking beyond his inner horizon, he approaches, for example, questions of foreign relations. But in what concerns France, the knowledge of parties, the play of different elements, their quality and relative strength, he is an excellent critic. What he says of the moderate party, of the constitutional party of the time, of that sane majority of the nation, of that middle class of which he was the glory, and that he knew so well, is worthy of being remarked :

‘The moderate party which, whether in number or in composition, might be regarded as the nation itself, is almost a cipher in respect of influence ; it throws its weight, indeed, to the side which tries to slacken the movement, but it hardly dares publicly to explain its desire. When the events it has most dreaded have come to pass, it subscribes to them, it forsakes its old leaders and its old principles, and in the new march only seeks to form the rearguard still and to delay the progress of the revolutionary column, which it slowly and reluctantly follows.

‘This party has always basely abandoned its leaders, whilst the aristocratic or popular party has always valiantly supported its chiefs. All we can expect of it, as a rule, is a few secret prayers and a little applause when we have won them a victory. A weak support in success, no resources in defeat, no hope of vengeance.

‘In this Revolution there was never displayed any energy, any combination or talent except in attack. . . .’

Decidedly, Barnave is a general who knew his army well. No less well did he know his adversaries. After August 10, drawing a clear parallel between the authors of the first Revolution and those of the second, he ends

by asking: 'The former desired the establishment of a free and limited monarchy: *what did the others desire?*' It is the history of the Girondists at all times.

Barnave was removed from the prisons of the Dauphiné to Paris in November, 1793; during the journey, and foreseeing his near end, he wrote from Dijon to one of his sisters a letter which may be regarded as the will and testament of this serious, noble and stoically tender soul:

'I am still in my youth, he wrote, and yet I have already known, I have already experienced all the blessings and all the ills which constitute this human life; gifted with a lively imagination, I long believed in chimeras; but I have become disillusioned, and, now when I am about to leave this life, the only blessings I have regretted are friendship (nobody could flatter himself more than I of having tasted the sweets of it), and the cultivation of the mind, the habit of which often filled my days with delight'.

But he acknowledges at the same time that this moderate enjoyment, though it was a comfort, never sufficed for happiness. Then thinking of those who will survive, his mother, his sisters, the friends he does not dare to name, he speaks with that tone which denotes a moral integrity preserved to the last. These affectionate recommendations to his sister breathe the honour of his house and the religion of his family.

'Before everything, never marry any but a man whose conduct and sentiments are in harmony with your own; though he should be poor, provided that he is able to provide your wants by a profession and the power of work, let that not be an obstacle. You should feel and think in harmony, and form a family as ours was: that is the chief foundation of happiness'.

In conclusion, he does not appear to believe with much certainty in the persistence of thought beyond this life:

'My beloved ones, the hope that you will attain to a happy existence will sweeten my last moments; it will fill my heart. If this feeling existed beyond this life, if one could recall what one has left, that would be the sweetest idea for me. May my thoughts gradually become tender without being painful. Think that I have made a distant voyage, that I do not suffer, that if I could feel I should be happy and contented, provided that you are so'.

In this way an ancient, a friend of Cicero or Thrace might have spoken of his near end in the midst of friends, and had the courage to die.

After all to die at thirty two, at the zenith of a life so well filled when youth still shines, when acquired experience has not yet dried up within us all hope and faith in the regeneration of society and in the future destiny of humanity is not perhaps so lamentable a lot. What would Barnave have become if he had overcome that fatal epoch if he had lived? He would have seen the time come which he foresaw when the nation, *satiated with talk*, threw itself entirely to the side of victory. The Consul who erected a statue to Barnave by the side of Vergnaud's in the grand staircase of the palace of the Senate, would have made him ascend its steps, if he had lived. He would have become Count Barnave under the Empire. He would have attained an honourable old age, but whilst feeling the fire die down within him and no longer bearing the light on his brow. The other end was for him more dignified and more beautiful. He is now immortal in the memory of men; there he is fixed for ever in the attitude of youth, of talent, of virtue recovered in spite of errors and trials, and of a supreme and enviable sacrifice, which purifies and redeems all.

NOTE.—I owe to the kindness of the Marquis de Jaucourt, ex-Minister of State, who knew Barnave well, a few explanations which answer the questions I asked myself relative to the connexion of the celebrated orator with the Queen. The following is what M. de Jaucourt and the best-informed persons of his society believed on that subject (I reproduce exactly what was transmitted to me):

'Barnave never saw the Queen. It was Duport who saw her in Barnave's name; but the usual intermediary was the Chevalier de Jarjayes, whose wife belonged to the Queen's household. When the Queen wished to send any communication to Barnave, she slipped a sealed letter into Jarjayes' pocket, and the latter carried it to Barnave, who, after reading it, sealed it again and replaced it in the pocket of the messenger, in order that the Queen might resume possession of it and destroy it. The same method was adopted when Barnave sent his advice to the princess; the same conveyance by the said pocket, and the same return into Barnave's hands. It follows that Barnave was able to say, *à la rigueur or nearly so*, before the Revolutionary Tribunal, that he had never had any direct relations with the Queen, that he had never seen her, etc. Besides, the com

munications seem to have been written in such a manner, and in the third person, that neither correspondent could be very much compromised by them. Jarjayes' pocket was like a bureau where each deposited his thought, his personal reflection, his *monologue*, without appearing to be aware that another might gain knowledge of it.

'There remains no doubt (if we examine the matter with a mathematical precision) a certain restriction, a certain interpretation to be given to Barnave's words before the Revolutionary Tribunal: *I have never had any correspondence with the Castle*. But as the tribunal, so is the deposition'.

That is the most plausible explanation, in the same terms in which I have received them; and, in spite of all, our moral sentiment persists in suffering by so explicit a denial on the part of Barnave.

## PLINY THE NATURALIST<sup>1</sup>

Monday, April 22, 1850.

I HAVE long already had a desire, if only for the sake of variety, to speak for once of an ancient writer, and I dare not. It is not because subjects are wanting. I have here on my desk books that are very worthy of attention and of being recommended to studious readers: and, for example, an *Essay on the History of Criticism among the Greeks*, in which M. Egger has collected with learning and intelligence all the curious notions that one can desire on the critics, the rhetoricians, the grammarians of antiquity before and since Aristotle. The centre, the principal body of the work, is Aristotle himself and his *Poetics* translated and commented, that Poetic Art which so many people invoked yesterday and that so few have read. But to approach the ancients fittingly requires uncommon preparations. Machiavelli, in years of disgrace when he was forced to mingle with a vulgar life, read them only at a certain hour of the day, and after making his toilet as if to render himself worthy of approaching them. And then, to approach them is not enough; if one still desires to present them and make them acceptable to others, to what degree of familiarity must one not make them one's own? I know not if all art even would suffice to interest in them the men of our time, who are so much and so justly occupied with their own affairs, their own fears, and who, in their short moments of distraction, do not at least wish to exert themselves. Men, taken in the mass, are interested only in what concerns them, in the things of yesterday, in the things that still re-echo, in the great names which a favourable glory has not ceased to render present. The rest is a matter

<sup>1</sup> *Natural History*, translated by M. E. Littré.

of study, of solitary curiosity, of a distant plan reserved for years of retirement and repose, for those years which are always put off and which will never come; but in the usual current, in the torrent of interests and ideas, when one has but a quarter of an hour here and there to give up to Letters properly speaking, one has not time, in truth, to lend ear to an ancient, any more than, in a crowd where everybody jostles us, there is any possibility of stopping to speak with an old man who expresses himself with dignity and deliberation.

However, Pliny tempted me to-day. Among the ancients, the two Plinys have remained the most present and the most recent in the memory. They came to us hand in hand, the uncle and nephew; the latter told us in our childhood of the memorable death of the other. One knows enough about them to wish to know more. Pliny the Elder, called *the Naturalist*, has just been translated in full by M. Littré, and the excellent translator has besides appraised his author in a Notice written, like everything that comes from M. Littré's pen, with elevation of views, independence and firmness. Now is the time to form a correct idea of the celebrated person who is thus displayed in full light.

Pliny the Elder was not altogether a naturalist, as one might imagine at first sight, from the title and fame of his principal work: he was a man of war, an administrator. Born under Tiberius, he died in the same year as Titus, having lived through the reigns of Claudius and the other emperors, serving in the armies and in different public offices. As a young man, and commanding a body of cavalry in Germany, he had written a special and theoretical treatise on the *Art of Throwing the Javelin from Horse-back*. He had written besides, in twenty books, the *History of the Wars in Germany*, which did not prevent him afterwards composing books on rhetoric and even on grammar, on the difficulties of the language. It was in the reign of Nero that he passed his time in these petty grammatical and literary questions; it was not then safe for thought to take a higher flight. At one time he applied himself to jurisprudence, and pleaded as an advocate. This diversity of functions and studies was the glory and the strength of the Romans. When he died in the eruption of Vesuvius, at the age of fifty-

eight, he was in command the fleet at Misenum. Besides his large *Natural History* he had written, in his last years, a political *History of his Time*, in thirty-one books. In an interesting letter his nephew describes the nature of his mind and his habits of work. Pliny never lost a moment: rising before daylight, he found time at night for his favourite labours; those he called his moments of leisure. Devoting his day to his public functions and the service of his princes, he settled with his sleep for the remainder of his time, and deprived himself of as much of it as he could. *To live, he would say, is to watch.* So, although he died before his term, few men have lived more than he.

'He who knows not the value of time was not born for fame'. This thought of Vauvenargues appears to have been Pliny's rule of conduct. He would read, or have somebody read to him, at all hours, make notes and extracts of everything. His principle was 'that no book is so bad but that one may derive profit from some part of it'. He carried his economy of time to the point of avarice. One day when he was being read to in presence of one of his friends, the latter asked the reader to repeat a sentence which he had pronounced badly. 'Did you understand?' said Pliny. And when the friend replied that he had understood: 'Then, added Pliny, why make him begin again? Your interruption has made us lose ten lines'. All the time that was not devoted to study he regarded as wasted. His extracts on every matter were considerable. His nephew possessed as many as a hundred and sixty books of chosen extracts, written, he says, in a very small hand, and even on the back of the paper.

One may already have an idea of the nature of the *Natural History*, written by a man of whom that is the principal method. It will be a vast repertory, an inventory of all that has been said, rather than of what he has himself seen and observed. Pliny is not the least bit of an Aristotle, that is to say, a directly observing and original genius, criticizing the object of his experiments or his readings, and aspiring to discover the true laws. It has been said with magnificent justice of Alexander's tutor, that if anybody deserved to be called the teacher of the human race, it was he. There was only

one Aristotle in all antiquity. Pliny is anything but that; he appears to us only as a zealous student, curious about nature, but it is above all a curiosity of the study. Not that he does not directly observe the facts when an opportunity presents itself. He somewhere speaks of the experiments he made on the song of the swan; he will readily go to see a collection of medicinal plants in the garden of a celebrated amateur of his time, Antonius Castor; everything curious to be seen, he sees: witness his memorable death. That death, which is connected with the catastrophe of Vesuvius, has given him in the eyes of posterity the appearance of a stubborn observer, of a noble martyr to science. In reality, he was rather a man of letters, a scholar, admiring and studying nature through others' books and treatises, from which he delicately extracts and compiles the substance and the flower, and not only the flower, for he does not always exercise choice, and accepts as many errors as truths. In this immense Digest of nature, in this Encyclopedia in thirty-seven books, the author and collector appears remarkable and a master especially in this, that a broad breath of talent and greatness circulates through it, that the power of his pen nowhere shows any weakness, or any weariness in explaining so many often tiresome details. He enlivens them by piquant historical anecdotes; he improves them at least by concision; he elevates them whenever he can by moral views which have their beauty, even when they border on the commonplace, by a profound sense of the sacred immensity of nature, and also by that of the majesty of Rome.

After a preface in the form of a familiar Letter addressed to Titus, a witty letter, but difficult to understand in parts, and not written in the same tone as the rest of the work, Pliny enters into his subject-matter. The second book (which is really the first, since the preface cannot be regarded as one), treats of the world and the elements. Leaving aside physics and particular explanations, and considering only what I call ideas, it is easy to see that Pliny is a philosopher, a mind superior to most of the things he records. In connexion with the sun, the soul of nature, of which he draws a splendid picture, he comes to speak of God. He thinks 'that it is an indication of human weakness to inquire into the





tions. But it seems to me that one cannot fail at once to recognize in Pliny an enlightened man of his time, with whom an enlightened man of our time might enter into immediate understanding and relation, contribute his own and profit without being offended in any essential point and without offending in his turn; with whom, in a word, one might converse on equal terms as with a peer. What explanations Pliny did not find we could give him, without his offering any obstacles of a different order, any mystic or theological resistance; he would admit on proof the roundness of the earth, the antipodes, and the rest. I emphasize this point, because in comparing him with a celebrated encyclopedist of the Middle Age, Vincent de Beauvais, M. Littré appears to me not to have sufficiently differentiated perhaps the nature of Pliny's mind, a mind which closely resembled ours, which was in many respects contemporary with us, whilst that of the good chaplain of Saint Louis was very far from being so.<sup>1</sup>

Pliny has a cult and an enthusiasm for science, a grateful admiration of the illustrious inventors, a sense of the indefinite progress of human knowledge, regret at seeing it sometimes neglected and impeded by subordinate interests, by selfish and greedy passions. In the chapter on meteors and the chief currents of the winds, we should hear him speak of the ancient Greek observers and their comparative superiority:

'More than twenty old Greek writers have published their observations on this subject. And this is the more remarkable, seeing that there is so much discord in the world, and that it is divided into different kingdoms, that is into separate members, that there should have been so many who have paid attention to these subjects, which are so difficult to investigate. Especially when we consider the wars and the treachery which everywhere prevail; while pirates, the enemies of the human race, have possession of all the modes of communication, so that, at this time, a person may acquire more correct information about a country from the writings of those who have never been there than from the inhabitants themselves. Whereas, at this day, in the blessed peace which we enjoy, under a prince who so greatly encourages the advancement of the arts, no new in-

<sup>1</sup> Some very competent persons assure me that, whilst I do justice to Pliny, I am not sufficiently just to Vincent de Beauvais, whom, in fact, I know too little about, and I insert the criticism here as a reparation.

Il voit comme fournis marcher nos légions  
Dans ce petit amas de poussière et de boue,  
Dont notre vanité fait tant de régions !

Pliny has a sense of the misery and at the same time of the greatness of man, of the contradictions which he thinks he discovers in him. 'There is nothing more superb than man, he says, and more miserable'. Cuvier has reproached him with a peevish philosophy. Born in a period of calamities and corruption, Pliny indeed carries his moral impressions, and his resentments against society, so to say, into his considerations of nature. His seventh book, in which he treats of Man, begins with a powerful, eloquent and gloomy picture, which seems to reflect the colours of the poet Lucretius, and to provide subject-matter for the meditations of a Pascal. He shows us man, alone among the animals, cast *naked upon a naked earth*, signalizing his appearance in the world by tears, unable to laugh until the fortieth day; and on every occasion he endeavours to show us, by a sort of fatal privilege, that master of the unhappy earth, weak, ever kept in check, and, even in his snatches of pleasure, ever ready to repent of life. I am not going to discuss here this way of looking at things, which Pascal has so powerfully employed since. There are great minds which perhaps exaggerate difficulties and create contradictions within themselves, in order to have the trouble and satisfaction of afterwards unravelling them. More conciliating philosophers, more broadly contemplative minds, have held 'that there are no contradictions in nature'. Yet it is difficult, however indulgent one may be, not to see them in man, as he appears to us at least. Pliny contents himself with remarking the fact without trying to explain it. The whole book on Man is besides one of the most curious in the work. After gathering all sorts of strange and fantastic physiological facts on the sexes, on the organs of the senses, he comes to the great men, those who by reason of some distinction have excelled and been in the first rank. Caesar rightly appears to him to have been the first of mortals in the order of action':

'The most remarkable instance, I think, of vigour of mind in any man ever born was that of Caesar, the Dictator, he says. I am not at present alluding to his valour and courage, nor yet

By the side of Caesar and as it were in contrast to him, Pliny exalts Cicero, whom he calls the *torch of Letters*. One should see in the original text (for the best translations are pale in these passages) with what effusion he celebrates that fine genius, the only one that the Roman people produced that was truly on a level with the empire : 'Hail then to thee, he exclaims, who wast the first of all to receive the title of Father of thy country, who wast the first of all, while wearing a toga, to merit a triumph . . .' A few books farther we learn to our regret that the unworthy son of the illustrious orator was a shameless drunkard ; that he boasted of swallowing at a single draught immense measures of wine ; that one day when he was drunk he threw a cup at the head of Agrippa : 'No doubt, says Pliny ironically, this Cicero wished to deprive M. Antonius, the murderer of his father, of the palm of the drinker'.

Pliny's book on Man is filled with particulars and interesting anecdotes which are not found elsewhere. He continues making a choice among the *élite* of mankind and in every branch of life deducting, as he says, *the flower of mortals*. The fame of genius occupies and holds a great place in his attention. He tells us that Menander, the prince of comic dramatists, when the kings of Egypt and Macedonia rendered him so great homage and sent a fleet and ambassadors to ask for him, refused their offers, and won still more honour by preferring the literary sense, the *consciousness of Letters* (that is Pliny's expression), to the favour of kings.

When the Lacedemonians were besieging Athens, Bacchus, says Pliny, appeared several times in a dream to their king Lysander, warning him not to disturb the burial of him who had been *his delight*, the delight of Bacchus whose feasts were originally confounded with the solemnities of the drama. It was the great poet Sophocles who had just died. Lysander, having asked the names of the citizens who had recently died in Athens, immediately recognized the one whom the god wished to indicate, and allowed the funeral to take place in peace. Shall we conclude from this anecdote that Pliny believed in the god Bacchus ? Oh ! by no means. But if the anecdote is not true, it deserved to be ; and Pliny, who felt the same, has preserved it from oblivion.

No doubt all Pliny's anecdotes are not as delicate and beautiful as this, and he has some to suit the most diverse tastes. After exhausting his collection of curiosities of every kind relating to man, he concludes with a few philosophical reflections on the *Manes*, and on what follows after burial. These reflections are such as one might expect of a firm, practical mind, without any illusions, without any religious belief in the proper sense of the word. I cannot congratulate and still less reprove him for that. What I am anxious to point out, is that thoughts like those I have indicated, rendered so forcibly and expressively, suffice to classify a mind, whatever he may afterwards say and appear to accept or believe. Antiquity also had its eighteenth century, I mean its philosophic way of thinking. The eighteenth century of the ancients commenced very early and lasted a very long time, and Pliny belonged to it, if we probe him.

'Not only, said Buffon, the kindest of his critics, did he know everything that it was possible to know in his time, but he had *that facility to think on a grand scale*, which multiplies science. He had that delicacy of reflection on which depend elegance and taste, and he communicates to his readers a certain intellectual freedom, a boldness of thought which is the germ of philosophy . . . ' Buffon's judgment is extremely favourable to Pliny; it looks as if the great writer were grateful to him, as if he foresaw that he would himself be blamed some day for some of the faults imputed to the Roman author, and was pleased to greet in advance some of his own qualities in him, some of the general characteristics of his manner. Buffon brings to the consideration of Pliny a sort of liberality and generosity which it is always becoming in noble minds to accord one another across the ages. There is hospitality as it were in his judgment. He welcomes and treats his celebrated forerunner as if he were a stranger from Rome to whom he was doing the honours of the *Jardin-du-Roi*. Cuvier's judgment, though more severe, is much more just, according to M. Littré. Cuvier dwells less than Buffon upon Pliny's literary and philosophical merits; he acknowledges them, however, and makes every allowance with a strict but indisputable justice. It is an accurate drawing, traced with a sure hand. He estimates and

defines Pliny and his characteristics with as much precision as he would apply to the description of any other individual in natural history. As to the other judgments quoted by M. Littré, which come from men who specialize in the sciences, they are severe to the point of appearing harsh. I bow my head; those competent masters are no doubt trebly right in a matter which comes within their province; but, on those points which we are entitled to understand as well as they, they are wrong. If Pliny has felt so well and so often expressed the majesty, the grandeur and (why should we not say as he does?) the religion of nature, they have not by any means felt and deigned to understand that general spirit which circulated and breathed through Pliny. That *way of thinking on a grand scale* is hidden from them, and Buffon alone saw it; in judging Pliny he found some of those words which no other but he could have found. Cuvier's judgment, crowned with one or two of Buffon's sayings, would probably embrace the whole truth. All this is and can be no more than a literary and moral impression on my part; it is the only one I am entitled to bring to these learned subjects; but I give it merely as the result of my reading of the book on Man.

Pliny goes on to the investigation of the other animals, and you may believe that I am not going to embark with him. At every step, and even regarding the matter from the point of view of one who is uninitiated, one might meet with descriptions full of life and talent (that of the *Cock*, of the *Nightingale*, for example, in the book on Birds); at every step we find also more or less authentic, but interesting anecdotes, all of which, even in their errors, throw a strong light on the habits, the views and superstitions of antiquity. When he comes from the animals to the products of the earth, to the trees and other vegetables, Pliny explains the uses which the arts and industries made of them at the different periods. Thanks to him, we know exactly when and by whom each object of consumption and luxury was introduced into Rome. In connexion with the papyrus, for example, that plant which grows in Egypt, he speaks at some length of the manufacture of paper, of the different qualities it offered in respect of fineness or solidity, of the thinner kind which was used for letter writing, of

the kind used for longer works, of the *Augustan paper*, the *Livian paper*, of the *Claudian paper* (under the Empire did we not have the *Grand-Eagle paper* ?) : 'Papyrus, adds Pliny, is apt to fail occasionally ; such a thing happened in the time of the Emperor Tiberius ; when there was so great a scarcity of paper that members of the Senate were appointed to regulate the distribution of it : had not this been done, all the ordinary relations of life would have been completely disarranged'. Oh ! how welcome would such a famine be to us ! But such things happened only in the reign of Tiberius, and we cannot hope for such a piece of luck in our days.

After having, an indefatigable nomenclator, exhausted the catalogue of nature, of all that she produces and contains in her bosom, and of the numerous arts which spring from her, Pliny stops and concludes with this little final hymn : 'Hail to thee, Nature, thou parent of all things ! and do thou deign to show thy favours unto me, who, alone of all the citizens of Rome, have, in thy every department, thus made known thy praise !'

It was with the purpose of adding another observation to his great work, that, when he was at Misenum in command of the fleet, at the moment when the eruption of Vesuvius began to threaten, Pliny walked straight into the danger, in order to obtain a nearer grasp of that mystery whose cause he was so curious to know. He had always thought 'that a sudden death is the last happiness of life'. He was served according to his wish, and died from suffocation amid the tumult of the elements. It is in this rôle of an intrepid observer that posterity still loves to see him, expiring on the shore, with his tablets at his side. One should read again the story of his death in that celebrated letter which his nephew wrote to Tacitus on the event.

This nephew, adopted and brought up by him, whose memory cannot be dissociated from his own, is one of the most pleasing and, from our point of view (if we may say so), one of the most modern figures of antiquity. His Letters, which everybody may read in the pleasing translation of Sacy, bring before our eyes all the details of public life, of the domestic and literary life of an enlightened and gentlemanly Roman, under Trajan, in the fine period of the end of the Empire. Never was the

literary sense, properly speaking, the passion for fine studies and the honour they bring, never was the love of honest praise, the religion of fame and posterity, carried farther or more happily cultivated than by Pliny the Younger. He confesses his tastes and his becoming ambition with an innocence and an ingenuousness which disarm criticism, and I am surprised to find Montaigne taxing him so severely with vanity. To me Pliny's Letters, though collected, composed and rewritten at leisure, as Balzac since composed his, as we are told that Courier, in our own days, rewrote his, are still infinitely pleasing and charming to read. On a summer afternoon in the country, if you want to enjoy a slight taste, a savour of antiquity, if you are not too much tormented by passions, or memories, or the poetic fervour (for I will suppose that you are a bit of an author yourself, as everybody is nowadays), take Pliny, open him at random, and read. There are few subjects in life, especially those which come from familiarity with intellectual things, on which he does not offer some ingenious, brilliant and polished thought, one of those expressions which shine like an antique engraved stone, or like the white pebbles that he delights in describing to us when speaking of the beautiful waters of his fountains. Pliny is one of the small number of Romans who have what Sacy calls *morals* (*les mœurs*), that is to say, who are chaste, modest and decent. If he had had more vivacity of mind and relief, he would have been the Daguesseau of the decline of antiquity. We do not know precisely at what age he died, but we imagine him as having always preserved some of his youth, his laughter, his blush and purity, one of those faces which are quite astonished at their own white hair. He tells us of all the famous men of letters of his time, he corresponds with them, he writes to Quintilian, to Suetonius, to Tacitus: but especially with the latter is his memory still affectionately and intimately associated. Public opinion never separated them in their time. One day a man of education, a Roman knight, happened to be sitting next to Tacitus in the Circus, without knowing his name; after a quarter of an hour's conversation, having become aware that he was speaking with some well-known literary person, he said: 'You are either



again to eat inoffensive dishes in common . . .' Pliny and his uncle were men of humanity, moderation and enlightenment; but this humanity of the educated classes of that time had already become inadequate for the reformation of the world. It required more heroic remedies: that kind of holy madness called charity was not too much for the purpose. Pliny once comes across it in his path; he stops for a moment, but he does not know what to call it. His uncle too had forgotten that plant in his so complete Encyclopedia of the objects of nature. Thus it is that at certain epochs of the world's history the wisdom and even the virtue of the moderate and the sage are found vain, and the sick man calls for I know not what miracles and new virtues to save himself.

of these various trains passing before us. M. de Chateaubriand, after *Atala* and *René*, had his passionate, noble, tender, delicate admirers, devoted till death: at their head we might have seen the pale and pathetic Mme. de Beaumont. What would suffice to give the highest idea of the *quality* of M. de Chateaubriand's talent, is, as a rule, the distinguished nature of the women who were captivated by it, who were in love with him and his talent. M. de Lamartine came after, and we had thousands of sisters of Elvire, dreamy and melancholy like her. In latter years, and since the appearance of *Jocelyn*, the circle has grown wider, or rather it has changed, the Elvires having become Laurences. M. de Balzac, the famous novelist, had his train of women more than anybody, those of thirty and more in a mass, whose foibles and secret weaknesses he has caught and flattered so well, all those nervous and febrile organizations which he had the art to magnetize. In the eighteenth century, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, after the appearance of *Paul and Virginia*, was also besieged by lady admirers, among whom Mme. de Krüdner showed herself one of the most passionate. But it was Rousseau who began that great revolution in France, and who, in the matter of literature, decidedly brought the women to take an interest in it. He raised up in its favour that half of the human race, hitherto restrained and discreet enough; the enthusiasm of the fair sex for himself was unexampled. How can we describe that universal insurrection which broke out after the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, after the *Émile* (1759-1762), which preceded the Revolution of '89, and which was already preparing it at a distance? Did not Mme. de Staël, Mme. Roland, soon figure in the first rank in the train of what I call Jean-Jacques' women? More modest and less conspicuous, not less generous and devoted, Mme. de La Tour-Franqueville was one of the first; she leads the procession, and she deserves a unique place in the fame of the man to whom she devoted herself.

Who was this Mme. de La Tour? She has occupied Rousseau's bibliographers, for he, the ingrate that he is, did not say a word of her in his *Confessions*. What we know we owe to M. Musset-Pathay, to M. de La Porte, the author of a Notice on her; M. Ravenel provides

this Julie is not myself ; you may see that by my style : I am only her cousin at the most, or rather her friend, as much as Claire was'. It was Mme. de La Tour's friend who was here playing the part of Claire, and who betrayed to Jean-Jacques his new admirer, worthy herself of being admired. After some long-drawn-out eulogies of that unknown Julie and her claim to enter into relations with the great man, she indicated to Rousseau a means of replying. He did reply, and this first time by return of post, without waiting to be entreated. It is all very well being a misanthrope and a bear, one is still susceptible to those engaging advances of a new and still mysterious admiration. But after this first letter he takes his precautions, and already describes himself with his capricious changes : 'I hope, Madame, in spite of the beginning of your letter, that you are not an authoress, that you never had the intention of being one, and that you are not challenging me to a combat of wit, a kind of conflict for which I have as much aversion as incapacity'. He then enters seriously into this lengthy play of the Claires, Julies and Saint-Preux ; he did not pretend, as good taste would have demanded of a well-bred writer, to take the persons of his imagination lightly ; he continues to respect them, and to speak of them in confidence as if they were real models : 'To the author of a Julie you announce another who really exists, whose Claire you are. I am charmed for your sex, and even for my own ; for, whatever your friend may say, when there are Julies and Claires, there will be no lack of Saint-Preux ; caution her on that point, I entreat you, that she may be on her guard . . .' Then suddenly he is fired at the idea of finding somewhere an image of the two inseparable friends he had imagined ; an apostrophe, that favourite figure which is his literary habit, escapes him : 'Charming friends ! he exclaims, if you are as my heart supposes, may you, for the honour of your sex and the happiness of your life, never find any Saint-Preux ! But if you are like the others, may you find no other than a Saint-Preux !'

All that, read to-day in cold blood, by men of a generation which has not the same enthusiasms, a little strange a smile. After this

flight, Rousseau returns to real life more than was necessary, revealing to the two young women who are strangers to him, the details of his physical ills and infirmities: 'You speak of making my acquaintance; no doubt you do not know that the man to whom you are writing, afflicted with a cruel and incurable malady, has every day of his life a struggle between pain and death, and that the very letter he is writing to you is often interrupted by distractions of a very different kind'. When one knows what was the nature of Rousseau's malady, one is a little surprised at this direct allusion he makes to it. Montaigne indeed speaks of a similar malady from which he suffered, but he speaks of it to his readers, that is to say, to all the world; whilst here Rousseau speaks of his in a private letter to two young women to whom he is writing for the first time: that is going a little farther and improving upon Montaigne.

For the rest, he would have been wrong to constrain himself; for in the following letters these two women in their turn enter into details of health, not only with interest and affection, but with importunity and worry, to the extent of discussing at times the ways and means and the defects of conformation, just as any surgeon or anatomist might do. That is a want of taste and delicacy which characterizes the period, and especially the class of which Rousseau is a type.

What is no less characteristic is the tone, the style of the letters, both those of the two friends and Rousseau's own notes. I observe a frequent use of the imperfect subjunctive. On the subject of health the self-styled Claire will write to Jean-Jacques: 'Did you believe that we could be ignorant (*ignorassions*) of its deplorable state?' Mme. de La Tour introduces in one place a terrible word, *consultassiez*, and Rousseau seems to sanction it when he writes: 'I could not bear the idea that you should attribute (*attribuassiez*) to negligence . . .' What would Fénelon, what would Voltaire say? It is enough to make them suffer and cry out. Nor would you ever find those pedantically regular and methodical faults under the pen of the women of the end of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries. O light and negligent pen of the Aïssés, the Caylus and the Coulanges, where are you? In them we

should sooner find a mistake in spelling or grammar, much less serious in my opinion. But here everything is marked, accentuated, prominent. 'If I had received your letters, writes Rousseau to Mme. de La Tour, *I should not have denied their reception*'. Can you feel the fault? for if one cannot feel it, it is no use my proving it. And again, speaking of Claire's praises of her friend, he will say: 'With what pleasure her heart opens out on this *charming text*!' In a word, I seem to feel in this style, so regular and firm, so admirable in many happy pages, a foundation of acrid and strong pronunciation, which takes one by the throat, a remnant of a provincial accent.

I say the faults, but we must not insist upon them too much at first, and we must not lose the thread of the little romance which is hardly begun. To show, before all, what Mme. de La Tour was, that Julie who thought herself entitled to be compared with Julie d'Étanges, and to prove that she was not entirely unworthy of the comparison, I cannot do better than quote her own portrait, which she sent to Rousseau, one day when the latter, in one of his rare fits of gallantry, had asked her *how she dressed*, in order that he might fix her in his imagination, he said, and form some idea of her. For she only saw him three times altogether, and at this date when she traced her Portrait, she had not yet been to see him.

'However exactly I may try to describe my features in detail, she wrote to him, it will be impossible to give you a just idea of their ensemble; I know not how to set about it, and I am vexed. With regard to my height, at least, I will not put your imagination to any expense; reasonably shod, I am four feet nine inches and ten lines high, and as plump as I should be. My face, which, thanks to the small-pox with which it is slightly pitted, is the least fair part of my person, is not so bad for a brunette. Its outline is a perfect oval, and its profile agreeable. My hair is very dark and placed to great advantage; the forehead rather high and regular in shape; the eyebrows black and well arched; the eyes level with the face, large and dark blue, the eyeball small, the lashes black; my nose is neither big, nor thin, nor short, nor long, nor is it aquiline, and yet it helps to give me an eagle's physiognomy. My mouth is small and sufficiently bordered; my teeth are healthy, white and regular; my chin is well made, my neck a good shape, though rather

short. My arms, hands, fingers, nails even, are designed as the fancy of a painter might desire. Let us come now to my physiognomy, since, thank heaven, I have one. It shows contentment rather than gaiety, goodness rather than sweetness, vivacity rather than malice, more soul than intellect. I have an engaging glance, a natural expression and a sincere smile. From this portrait, which is indeed mine, you will think me beautiful as an angel? By no means! I have only one of those faces that one looks at twice. There remains a point which in my opinion is sufficiently bound up with the person to deserve mention, and which you yourself have not disdained: my manner of dressing. My hair usually forms my whole head-dress: I comb it up as negligently as possible, and add no ornament; in truth, I love it so excessively as to amount to pettiness. As I am modest and sensitive to cold, I display less of my person than any woman of my age. There is nothing in my dress that deserves the name of ornament. To-day, for example, I am wearing a grey satin dress, splashed with pink. . . .

Seat this woman at her harpsichord, singing an air out of the *Devin du Village*, or place her at her writing-table, with Jean-Jacques' Works in a row in front of her, and above them the portrait of the man who is the saint of her oratory, and you will have Mme. de La Tour.

If our readers have not quite forgotten a charming self portrait, which we quoted some little time ago, of a grand lady of the seventeenth century, the Marquise de Courcelles,<sup>1</sup> they may picture to themselves the two tones and the two centuries in their perfect contrast: on one side, refined, delicious and light grace; on the other, firmer, more outlined features, by no means contemptible, and a turn of grace which only wants a certain easy and natural negligence.

Although it is a beauty in his own style and cut after the pattern of his ideal, Rousseau himself is sensible of the want. He thinks Mme. de La Tour's mind is clear and luminous; but at the very beginning he had observed in her letters a style of handwriting that was too much joined and too formed, an extreme regularity in spelling, a punctuation 'more correct than that of a printer's foreman', something, in short, which, to his suspicious mind, had suggested for a moment that it might be a man who was thus disguising himself to play

<sup>1</sup> See vol. i of the *Causeries du Lundi* (p. 42 of the present translation).

him a trick. On seeing in her his own work, he could not help thinking her too perfect.

Mme. de La Tour was a lady of merit and virtue. Married to a man hardly worthy of her, and from whom on the advice and with the consent of her family she was separated in the end, she did not abuse her misfortune and think she was entitled to find consolation elsewhere. She has a fault, however, like all the women of this school of Rousseau: she speaks not only of her sensibility and her charms, she speaks of her character, of her *principles*, of her *morals* and her *virtue*. I know not whether the ladies of the seventeenth century had more or less of all those things; but as a rule they themselves said nothing about them, and that is more agreeable, more fitting indeed, whether it be that it is better not to parade one's failings, or that it is in better taste and shows a better grace to allow others to discover one's qualities.

Mme. de La Tour wrote one day to Rousseau: 'If my heart were not out of the common, I should not dare to confess to myself how much I am interested in you'. This testimony she renders of herself is just, and certainly her heart was set on a high level. But when a woman truly loves, with a passion of the heart and not of the head, does it occur to her thus to raise her heart out of the *common class* and distinguish it? Did the true lovers, the Portuguese Nun, for example, think of that?

Mme. de La Tour's enthusiasm for Jean-Jacques is not affected, it is sincere, and yet, like its object and hero himself, it has a false ring. She becomes exalted on the purity of her passion, on the beauty of the motive which animates her. She would like to see in the aged and infirm misanthrope a real Saint-Preux, an ideal Saint-Preux, all soul and all mind, all flame. The instinct of her sex, that is to say her good sense, indeed whispers to her at times that she has little to expect from him, that she can hardly draw any response from him, and that it is, after all, hardly becoming in a woman to throw herself at the head of a churlish fellow (though he might be a great writer), who cares nothing for her and who snubs her. Then suddenly, passing over the objection, she exclaims: *He is a man!* what does that matter? Should the frivolous distinction of the sexes be admitted

in an intercourse of which the soul bears all the cost ? ' There we have the false ring, the impossible which commences. But it is precisely the sex (do you not understand it ?) which, ever recalled or understood, vaguely indicated and felt, forms the charm of this kind of correspondence, even when most pure, from which one expects nothing beyond the charm itself.

Mme. de La Tour's friend, the self-styled Claire, who has started the correspondence in her friend's name, was the first and the only one to give it up. She was disgusted at Rousseau's explosions of ill-humour, and they were indeed rude on certain days, especially when the two friends expected letters, answers from him, which they did too often. One day when he had been too much plagued and tormented by the two friends on the rarity and the brevity of his replies, Rousseau, driven to extremes, wrote the following letter to Mme. de La Tour :

' At Montmorency, January 11, 1762.

' Saint-Preux was thirty years of age, in good health, and only taken up with his pleasures ; nobody is less like Saint-Preux than J.-J. Rousseau. After a letter like the last, Julie would have been less offended at my silence than alarmed at my condition ; she would not, in such a case, have amused herself with counting letters and underlining words ; nobody is less like Julie than Mme. de . . . (de La Tour). You are a woman of much intellect, Madame, you are very pleased to show it, and all you desire of me is letters : you belong to your quarter more than I thought.

' J.-J. ROUSSEAU.'

Observe that Mme. de La Tour lived in the Rue Richelieu, in the Palais-Royal quarter, and that Rousseau's final allusion was nothing less than a gross insult. Mme. de La Tour's friend, *Claire*, took the hint : ' I have given myself three fierce blows, she wrote to her friend, for having had the idea of starting the correspondence between you. Socrates said that he looked into the glass when he wished to see a fool. Let us give this recipe to our animal '. In the last letter she had written to Rousseau, this Claire, who had perhaps more wit, or at least a more easy and sly wit than Mme. de La Tour, had hurled at the eloquent churl the most cruel word he could have heard : ' Go, she said to him, you



are like any other man'. Molière's *Dorine* could not have invented anything better.

Indeed, it was precisely Rousseau's great pretension, the germ of his malady and of the malady of his successors, that he was not cast in the same mould as other men: 'I am not like anybody I have yet seen; I presume to think that I am not like any man alive'. What Rousseau says there at the opening of his *Confessions*, all those who have Rousseau's malady say or secretly think. René, who flatters himself so greatly on being unlike his celebrated forerunner, exclaimed just like him in *Les Natchez*: 'Thou alone, Supreme Being, source of love and beauty, *Thou didst create me such as I am, and Thou alone canst comprehend me!*' The most cutting homage one can pay to a man of that nature and with that mania, is to say to him: 'We understand you, we know you, we admire you; but you have more equals, or at least more fellows than you think'.

Mme. de La Tour did not follow her friend's example; she was not disheartened. It was not her head alone that had become exalted for Rousseau; she loved him sincerely, warmly, unreasonably, with the devotion of a woman who had not till then found any object on which to place her romantic affections. A few phrases of his, addressed to her in his first notes, quite literary phrases whose meaning she exaggerated, and that she read over and over again, had led her to believe that she might have occupied for a moment a place in his heart which had not been vacant for anybody since Mme. d'Houdetot had filled it. She resumed the correspondence alone, and this time without the knowledge of Claire; she was what one so easily becomes when one is in love, troublesome, obstinate, often awkward; she became an obsession. Incessantly mortified, she returned to the charge, refusing to be repulsed. Proud and sensitive, she received many wounds, and yet forgave him every time. The name of *Julie*, which Rousseau had at first bestowed upon her, was taken away; he no more called her anything but *Marianne*. She submitted to these painful diminutions of testimonies already so grudgingly given and so rare, and showed herself grateful still for what she did obtain. He sometimes forgot even that name of *Marianne*, and did not know

what to call her when writing; she had to recall it to his memory. No matter, she still grasped at the smallest marks of attention, and was touched by what was certainly not worth the pains. The interval of two or three years during which Rousseau had taken refuge in Switzerland, and was living at Motiers (1762-1765), was the period when the correspondence was most continuous and brought most comfort to the poor Marianne. One day Rousseau wrote to her, after the receipt of the pretty page containing the Portrait I have quoted: 'How pleasant it will be to me to hear out of so pretty a mouth all the kind things you write me, and to read in your dark blue eyes, armed with dark lashes, the friendliness you feel for me!' That was the finest moment. 'Do you know that your letter is charming,' replies Mme. de La Tour, and that, in order that I may not find you yourself so charming, I have had to recall to memory the many clouds which obscured the fine days that you sometimes procured me? . . . More even, our intercourse would be too fascinating; as it is, it fascinates me enough to cause me pleasure and pain; more would be too much'. Let us be just: there are moments too when we can understand Rousseau's impatience, when we can almost share it; for Mme. de La Tour, though she does not seem to know it, is very exacting. She one day sent him another portrait, but a real portrait painted in miniature. To this gift she attached an importance that is very natural in a woman, in a woman who loves, who would like to be loved without having yet been seen; but this importance betrays itself by too much anxiety. She desires Rousseau *at the very moment* he receives the portrait and the accompanying letter (even though he does not send his reply for a week after), to sit down and write . . . what? . . . to write his first impression. She wants to catch that impression quite fresh, in such a way that it will make only one leap from the mind and heart to the paper. Rousseau obeys, but in two words, and too coldly for the sensitive Marianne: 'Behold it then at last, that precious portrait so justly desired! it reaches me at a moment when I am surrounded by intruders and strangers . . . I thought it right to acknowledge its reception, to set your mind at rest'. The poor Marianne is in despair

and furious at receiving so little: 'Your laconic reply grieves me, my friend'. She would like to know what he thought of her from the portrait; she takes good care to inform him that it is not a flattering likeness; that everybody thinks her better looking. In short, she is a woman. Alas! all that rests upon a delusion, on the idea that when loving she can herself be loved. Mme. de La Tour did not know that, after Mme. d'Houdetot, Rousseau's heart had no flame to return. So, in spite of all her efforts, she can find no place in that locked and soured heart; she would have liked to bring a sweetness, a secret comfort to that glory; that would, no doubt, have been very difficult at any time, but now that she attempts it it is decidedly too late.

Rousseau tells her so in every tone, he enumerates his physical ills, the obsession he thinks he suffers, intruders, spies, I know not what. 'With all that, he adds sensibly enough, a man who has not a sou of income cannot live on air, and is much concerned with providing his daily bread. But I laugh at my simplicity, trying to make you understand a situation so different from your own, you, a Parisian lady, idle from your position, who, having no other occupation but that of writing and receiving letters, expect all your friends to be occupied in the same way. . . . I know, he said again, with as much truth as bitterness, I know that it is not in the human heart to put itself in another's place, when demanding anything'.

She rises again every time she is hit, and not without profit; for she has wit, dignity—above all, a generous heart. I do not like her when she is prostrate in adoration before her idol, when she solemnly speaks to him of the *universe*, when, on receipt of one of his printed works by the petty post, she exclaims: 'I sighed that I could not take the universe to witness so flattering a distinction'. She does not appear much to advance when she says: 'You have the finest genius of the century; I have the best heart in the world. . . . You are worthy to have statues erected in your honour; I am worthy of erecting them'. All that is declamatory, like a page of Jean-Jacques himself. But she resumes her woman's superiority when she adds: 'You are the most sensitive of men; I, though not perhaps the most

sensitive of women, am more sensitive than you ; you have received my homage without disdain, I have offered it to you without pride ; it is yourself that you love in me ; I love in you only yourself, and we are both right'.

At this period Rousseau's reason had already become profoundly impaired ; he began to appear mad not only in the vague and general sense of the word, but to be really so in the precise and medical sense. His Correspondence with Mme. de La Tour during his sojourn in Switzerland bears traces of that irritation, that super-excitation of *vanity*, that is to say of what, in this kind of madness, is both the cause and the symptom of it : ' You say that I am not a matter of indifference to anybody, he wrote one day to Mme. de La Tour ; so much the better ! I cannot bear the lukewarm and I would rather be hated outright by a thousand, and loved in the same way by only one. *Whoever is not enthusiastic about me, is not worthy of me* '. There we have the morbid fibre beginning to vibrate. He cannot contain himself any longer ; the trigger is pulled ; he adds : ' A man may not love my books, and I see nothing wrong in that ; but *whoever does not love me because of my books, is a rogue* : I shall never be dissuaded of that '. His mind was already touched. One feels humiliated for what one calls human talent or genius, when one thinks that it was after this time that Rousseau wrote some of his divinest pages, the first books of the *Confessions*, the fifth promenade of the *Rêveries*. This bruised organism seemed only the better able to produce some of its most delicious fruits. Determined, in consequence of the persecutions he had met with in Switzerland, to cross over to England and entrust himself to the hospitality of David Hume, Rousseau returned for a moment to Paris (December, 1765). There has recently been published in Edinburgh a *Life of Hume*, which throws a perfect light on this episode of Rousseau's life. Hume's letters are a valuable and impartial testimony in this connexion. The dispassionate mind of the English philosopher was quite pronounced at the time in favour of the man who desired to be his guest. The philosophers in vain told him that he would no sooner have arrived at Calais before they would quarrel, Hume would not

believe it ; he saw him so mild, so polite, so modest, so naturally cheerful and of such agreeable humour in conversation : ' He has, he said, more the behaviour of a man of the world than any of the learned here, except M. de Buffon, who in his figure and air and deportment, answers your idea of a *maréchal* of France, rather than that of a philosopher. M. Rousseau is of small stature, and would rather be ugly, had he not the finest physiognomy in the world, I mean the most expressive countenance'. Hume called him the *pretty little man* ; he did not see too much affectation even in the Armenian dress that Rousseau then wore under pretext of his infirmity. But this same David Hume judges him admirably when a month or two later, and before their quarrel, seeing Rousseau determined to entrust himself alone in a country district, he predicts that he will be as unhappy there as anywhere else : ' He will be entirely without occupation, he writes to Blair, without company and almost without amusement of any kind. He has read very little during the course of his life, and has now totally renounced all reading : He has seen very little, and has no manner of curiosity to see or remark : He has reflected, properly speaking, and studied very little ; and has not, indeed, much knowledge : He has only *felt* during the whole course of his life ; and, in this respect, his sensibility rises to a pitch beyond what I have seen any example of ; but it still gives him a more acute feeling of pain than of pleasure. He is like a man who were stript, not only of his clothes, but of his skin, and turned out in that situation to combat with the rude and boisterous elements, such as perpetually disturb the lower world '. Certainly it is impossible to give a better picture of Rousseau's moral and physiological state ; and, with a guest with such a morbid sensibility, thus abandoned to solitude, ' without occupation, without books, without society (except that wretched Thérèse), and *without sleep* ', Hume should have been less surprised at the result.

I have meanwhile forgotten Mme. de La Tour, and Rousseau, in his passage through Paris, almost forgot her himself. She was anxiously expecting a word from him to say that he had arrived, and perhaps that he would come to see her : ' I heard that you were in Paris, my dear Jean-Jacques ; I could not believe it, not having

heard it from yourself'. But the *dear Jean-Jacques* was on that day not in an amiable vein : ' I have received your two letters, Madame ; nothing but reproaches ! As, whatever situation I may be in, I never receive anything else from you, I take them for granted, and make my arrangements accordingly. My arrival and stay here are not a secret. I have not been to see you, because I do not go to see anybody . . . ' And he gives her to understand, her who already thought herself an old friend, that she is to him no more than a new friend, one among a large number, who has not yet succeeded in finding a real place in a corner of his heart. She takes heart in spite of all ; she presents herself at his door in the Temple, where the Prince de Conti has given him an asylum. She arrives at a time when she expected to find him alone, but he was not ; she enters all the same, and it appears, from the gratitude she shows, that her reception was not so very bad : he embraced her on her departure. That was the only time that the sight of the object of her worship gave her any satisfaction. Six years later (April, 1772), when Jean-Jacques was back in Paris, she appeared one morning at his lodgings in the Rue Platrière, on the pretence of having some music to copy. She did not give her name, and he did not recognize her. She came again two months later, giving her name ; she had little success ; he gave her her dismissal by letter, signifying to her that that third visit was sufficient. A prey to his fixed ideas, Rousseau was at this time not himself.

Mme. de La Tour had, however, deserved well of him in a memorable circumstance, and he himself appeared to appreciate her devotion. When six months after Rousseau's departure for England, the quarrel with Hume broke out, and all Paris took sides for or against, Mme. de La Tour did not hesitate : she was for Jean-Jacques at any cost ; it is the glory and the right of women in such cases to act blindly. She published anonymously a *Letter* entirely favourable to her friend's character, she who knew so well how unjust and insulting he could be without any cause. This *Letter*, which has to-day lost all interest, testifies to a firm pen, capable of carrying on a virile controversy, of wielding an Amazon's lance. ' When I read it, wrote Rousseau, my heart beat,

and I recognized my dear Marianne'. But this gratitude quickly passed off, and his heart was already too much beset by suspicion to accept anything pleasant for long.

A strange man, a powerful and fascinating writer, it is continually necessary to consider him from both aspects in judging him. If he was his own tormentor and a great trouble to himself, he was a still greater trouble to the world. Not only did he throw a fascination over passion, he succeeded, as Byron said, in giving to folly an appearance of beauty, and in covering mistaken actions and thoughts with the divine colouring of words. He was the first to impart to our language a continuous force, a firmness of tone, a solidity of texture, which it did not possess before, and that is perhaps his surest title to fame. As to the substance of his ideas, all is doubtful in him, all may justly be regarded as equivocal and suspicious; sane ideas are every moment combined with false ones and are corrupted by the combination. By surrounding half-truths with a false light of evidence, he more than any other writer contributed to put the proud and the weak on the wrong path. One day, in a moment of abandon, talking about his works with Hume, and admitting that he was sufficiently satisfied with their style and eloquence, he happened to add: 'But I still dread that my writings are good for nothing at the bottom, and that all my theories are full of extravagances'. The work he thought most of was the *Contrat social*, the most sophistical of all forsooth, and the one that was to contribute most to upsetting the future. To us, whatever reason may say, to all of us who poetically belong, in any degree, to his posterity, it will be always impossible not to love Jean-Jacques, not to forgive him much in consideration of his pictures of youth, of his passionate feeling for nature, of the reveries which we owe to his genius, and for which he first created the expression in our language. Chateaubriand, in a final judgment, insisting on the essential defect in his character, said of him: 'That an author should go out of his senses through the infatuation of his vanity; that ever in presence of himself, never losing sight of himself, his vanity should deal an incurable wound at his brain, that is of all the causes of madness the one I can least

and I press in it ; but let her name at least remain associated with the renown of the man who so often repelled much good to whom she devoted herself without a murmur ; for long be given the only consolation she ever would have  
A strife that of living for ever, as a votary, in his glory !



and of course it is in that sense that I use it here. The Société des Bibliophiles (I return to it) was established 'for the purpose of maintaining and spreading the taste for books, of publishing or reproducing unpublished or rare works, especially those which concern history, literature or language, and to perpetuate in its publications the traditions of the old French printing art'. It has not hitherto failed in carrying out its programme. From 1820 to 1834 it published seven volumes of *Mélanges*, which contain mediæval plays, letters or opuscles of celebrated people. The only drawback in connexion with those first volumes of the *Mélanges* is, that they are almost inaccessible for the ordinary reader; for they have been printed only in a small number of copies, and only for as many heads as there were members. Since then the Society has published (1844) a magnificent collection of engravings representing the *Playing Cards* of all the countries in the world. From that moment it entered into a broader, more open way of publication, bringing its works within the reach of all; and it was right. In this age one should think of the useful, even in the rare and the choice; every distinction must find its pardon through some concession to the majority. *Le Ménagier de Paris*, published three years ago, in the name of the Society, by the care of M. Jérôme Pichon, offers a curious treatise on morality, honest civility and domestic economy, the whole compiled by a good citizen of Paris in the fourteenth century, for the use of his young wife. This book introduces us into the rich household of well-bred people of the time, and we know every detail of it as well as if we had lived in it. In quite another order the Society will soon publish the *Tales of the Queen of Navarre*, revised after the manuscripts. M. Le Roux de Lincy has undertaken this labour, and to him we shall be indebted for this truly first and original edition. Then only shall we be able to judge of the book of the witty Queen, which all the editors, even the first, I am assured, have strangely disfigured.

The Société des Bibliophiles consists in all of twenty-four members. If we run down the list of present members, which is printed at the head of the volume of *Mélanges* which we are noticing, we shall remark the names of amateurs who are well known, and justly so, for having

'The Princess, says that faithful historiographer, arrived about six o'clock. The King came down from his apartments, and received her at the foot of her coach, saying to me: *For to-day, you will consent that I do your office.* He embraced the Princess in the coach, and gave her his hand to help her down; he conducted her to her apartments; on the way he presented to her Monseigneur, Monsieur and M. de Chartres; the Princess kissed his hand several times while mounting the staircase. The crowd was so great and the rooms were so small, that the King, after remaining a short time, sent everybody out, and then returned to his own apartments, where he told us that he was going to commence a letter to Mme. de Maintenon, to tell her what he thought of the Princess, and that he would finish his letter after supper, when he had seen a little more of her'.

We shall presently see this letter which Louis XIV is in such haste to write. We shall see that he was very quick in forming an idea and an impression; but this first impression was, in fact, of capital importance in a Court and on a stage where it was necessary, above all, to make a successful entrance, and ever to keep up appearances. 'I took the liberty, adds Dangeau, to ask him, as he was returning to his room, if he was satisfied with the Princess; he answered me *that he was too satisfied, and that he could hardly contain his joy*'. A quarter of an hour after, the King went back to see her: 'He made her talk, he looked at her figure, her bust, her hands, and then added: *I would not for the world have her different in any way, in regard to her person.* He made her play spillikins with the ladies in his presence and admired her skill'. He examines her, *neither more nor less*, like a pretty animal, as one might examine a gazelle. A servant announces that *the meal is served*; they go to supper; nothing but praise is heard from the King on the noble air of the little princess, on her manner of eating. 'Whilst he was in his cabinet after supper, he sat all the time on a little seat, and made her sit in an arm-chair, saying: *Madame, this is how we should be together, and in all freedom*'. That, indeed, savours more of the grand-papa and the bonhomme, but do not trust to first appearances; it is only the old man who is ready to be distracted and amused; it would be a great mistake to draw too many conclusions in favour of his affection. Before retiring to sleep, the King finishes that important letter to Mme. de Maintenon, in which he gives a most detailed

account of the Princess' person and slightest movements ; it was the State affair of the moment. The original of this letter of Louis XIV exists in the Louvre Library, and the authoress of the present *Notice* gives it in full. Let us read then some pure Louis XIV, or rather let us listen to the great King talking and relating : an excellent language, a clear, correct and perfect turn, appropriate terms, a supreme good taste for everything external and showy, for everything connected with royal appearance. As to the moral background, it is thin and mediocre, it must be confessed, or rather it is absent. But let us read first :

At ten o'clock in the evening before going to bed, the King added as a postscript :

'The more I see of the Princess, the more I am satisfied. We had a general conversation, in which she said nothing ; that is saying enough. She has a very handsome, one might say a perfect, figure and a modesty which will please you. We have had supper ; she made no mistakes, and showed a charming politeness to all ; but to me and my son she showed every respect, and behaved as you might have done. She was well looked at and observed, and everybody appears honestly satisfied. The air is noble, the manners are polished and agreeable ; I have pleasure in speaking favourably of her, for I think that, without any reserve and flattery, I can do so, and that everything obliges me thereto'.

Now shall I presume to express my thought ? Her modesty is indeed mentioned in one or two places in this letter ; but it is her modest air and the good effect it produces, and the charm which results from it. For the rest, it is impossible to see in these pages anything but a charming physical, external, worldly description, without the slightest thought of any inner and moral qualities. Evidently the King cares as little about them, in this case, as he is anxious about the outside. Let the Princess succeed and please, let her charm and amuse, let her adorn the Court and enliven it, let her then have a good confessor, a Jesuit and safe confessor, and for the rest let her be and do what she pleases, the King her grandfather will ask nothing more of her : that is the impression which this letter gives me.

But it would be too bourgeois in us to expect the great King to show a kind of solicitude that would be becoming in an ordinary paterfamilias. The moral to be drawn from this first letter would not seem to be complete, however, unless we contrasted with it one of Saint-Simon's most memorable pages. One day, twelve years afterwards, the young Princess was become the ornament and the soul of the Court, the unique joy of the private life of the King and Mme. de Maintenon, those morose old people. She was pregnant. The King intended to go to Fontainebleau ; meanwhile he would not give up his journeys to Marly. In short, he would not allow his habits to be disarranged in any way, and, as his granddaughter amused him and he could not do without her.

she had to take part in all his excursions, cost what it might, and at the risk of an accident. She had followed her grandfather then to Marly, and the King was strolling after mass beside the Carp Pond, when one of the Duchess' ladies came up in great haste, and announced to the King that in consequence of the journey, the young woman was in danger of a miscarriage. I am translating it all into commonplace prose and modern style. The King, very vexed, told the news with a single word to the surrounding courtiers: 'The Duchess of Burgundy is injured'. Thereupon all were loud in regrets, saying it was a great misfortune and might endanger her confinements in future.

'Well! and what if it did? suddenly and angrily interrupted the King, who had not so far said a word; what should I care? Has she not already a son? and even though he should die, is not the Duke of Berry old enough to marry and have children? and what does it matter to me which of them succeeds me; are they not all equally my grandsons?—And suddenly, with impetuosity: Thank God! she is injured, since it was to be so, and I shall not be again thwarted in my journeys and anything else I desire to do by the remonstrances of the physicians and the talking of the midwives. I shall go and come as I please, and they shall leave me alone.—This outburst was followed by a silence in which one could hear an ant walk. The courtiers hung their heads, and hardly dared to breathe. Everybody was stupefied; even the builders and the gardeners remained motionless. This silence lasted more than a quarter of an hour'.

For all the details and the accessories of this admirable scene I refer to Saint-Simon who is, in this place, our Tacitus, the Tacitus of a king who was not usually cruel, but who was cruel on that day by force of selfishness.

If there had slipped into the letter written from Montargis a glimpse of moral anxiety, in the midst of all the external graces and all the perfect good breeding there described, Louis XIV would not have been, after twelve years of intimacy at all hours, the odious and hard grandfather we have just seen towards the mother of his heir. This first letter, so elegant, so smiling on the surface and in appearance, contained at bottom only vanity, the egotism of the master, mere anxiety about a cursey.

and decorum: the scene at the Carp Pond is the last touch.

I shall not here reproduce the various portraits of the Duchess of Burgundy, which should be transcribed from many a passage and copied especially from Saint-Simon; they will be found happily framed and encircled by delicate touches in the *Notice* of Mme. de Noailles (*Mon Dieu!* I have let the cat out of the bag). The Duchess of Burgundy was neither handsome nor pretty, she was better than that. Every part of the face, taken separately, might appear defective or even plain, and all this plainness, all these defects and irregularities, arranged and united by the hand of the Graces, combined to form I know not what harmony of the person, a delicious ensemble whose movement and whirl charmed your eyes and soul. From the moral side it was the same, and I shall here take the liberty of being less circumspect than the authoress of the *Notice*. It would seem almost, according to this gracious and discreet writer, as if the Duchess of Burgundy were an accomplished and perfect person, and that the education at Saint-Cyr had deeply influenced her. Be on your guard against that belief. It is true that she played a part in *Athalie*, but why should we not also know what she thought of *Athalie*, capricious child that she was? Speaking of those performances at Saint-Cyr Mme. de Maintenon wrote: 'Now *Athalie* has also fallen through! Misfortune pursues everything that I protect and love. The Duchess of Burgundy has told me that it would not succeed, that it was a very uninteresting play, that Racine had repented of it, that I was the only one who esteemed it, and a thousand other things which have convinced me, from the knowledge I have of the Court, that she does not like her part. She wants to play Josabeth, which she cannot do as well as the Comtesse d'Ayen'. And as soon as she is given the part she desires, everything is different, the whole point of view has changed in an instant; here we have a glimpse behind the scenes of Saint-Cyr. 'She is delighted, continues Mme. de Maintenon, and thinks *Athalie* wonderful. We will play it, since we are pledged to do so; but indeed it is not pleasant to arrange the pleasures of the great'. The Duchess of Burgundy belongs to that species of the great which is vanishing from day to day, and which

will soon have disappeared. She deserves to remain from afar one of the gayest and most seductive representatives of it in its fugitive course.

Her Letters which are published to-day are mere notes which will not add much to the idea one has formed of her mind ; a portion of these notes are addressed to Mme. de Maintenon. In them we see the young princess repenting of the unfortunate taste for gambling which she shared with the whole Court. In his Memoirs, written about 1699, La Fare remarked very truly that since the death of Madame Henriette, Duchess of Orleans (1670), the taste for intellectual things had diminished greatly in that brilliant Court of Louis XIV : ' It is certain, he says, that by the death of that princess, the Court lost the only person of her rank who was capable of loving and distinguishing merit ; and that since her death there has been nothing but *gambling, confusion and unpoliteness* '. Voltaire, who sees the age of Louis XIV through the prism of his childhood, protests loudly against such an assertion. Whilst admitting that La Fare's picture is a little forced, the remark still remains just. Towards the end of the reign of Louis XIV, the taste for esprit and polite literature reappeared, no doubt, and found favour in the little Courts of Saint-Maur and Sceaux ; but the bulk of those at Court at that period were a prey to *bassette, lansquenet* and other excesses, in which excessive wine-drinking had its good share. The Duchess of Berry, the daughter of the future Regent, was not the only young woman of the time who occasionally became intoxicated. The Duchess of Burgundy herself, at her entrance into this world, had a difficulty in refraining from sometimes indulging in those vices of the time, those fancies among which *lansquenet* was the most notorious and the most ruinous. More than once the King or Mme. de Maintenon had to pay her debts.

' I am in despair, my dear aunt, she wrote to Mme. de Maintenon (May, 1700), that I continue to do such foolish things, and give you cause to complain of me. I am very determined to mend and to cease playing at that unfortunate game which only injures my reputation and diminishes your friendship, which is more precious to me than anything. I entreat you, my dear aunt, not to speak of it, in case I keep the resolution I have taken. If I once break it, I shall be delighted if the King

forbids me to play any more, and I feel the effect of the impression it makes upon his mind against me. I shall never console myself for being the cause of your ills, and shall never pardon that cursed *lansquenet*. Forgive me, then, my dear aunt, my past faults. . . . What I should most wish in the world would be to be a princess who is esteemed for her conduct, and I will try to merit that in future. I flatter myself that I am not yet so advanced in age, and that my reputation is not so tarnished, but that I shall succeed in time'.

She asked forgiveness with so much good grace and submissiveness by letter, so prettily and playfully by word of mouth, that she was very sure of obtaining it.

Those who judged her most severely admit besides that she corrected herself as she grew older, and that her will, her rare understanding, the sense of the rank she was to hold, towards the end got the better of her first impetuosities and her petulance: 'Three years before her death (writes the Duchess of Orleans, mother of the Regent, an honest and terrible woman who bluntly says whatever she thinks), the Dauphine entirely changed to her advantage; she played no more wild pranks, *and did not drink to excess*. Instead of behaving like a wild, unruly creature, she became reasonable and polite, bore herself according to her rank, and did not allow the young ladies to be on familiar terms with her, by dipping their hands in the dish. . . .' There is inconvenient praise, which one could dispense with. But at this distance we may hear anything without any scruple, and, whilst making allowance for the homage paid to one who had the gift of charming, we should dare to see the morals of the time as they were. We should resolve, at any cost, to come out of Mme. de Maintenon's room and that sanctuary twilight. The Duchess of Burgundy had been portrayed in the dress of a lady of Saint-Cyr. It is not in that habit that she is, in my opinion, most natural and most true.

A delicate question presents itself, more delicate than that of playing *lansquenet*: had the Duchess of Burgundy any love affairs? Worshipped by her young husband, and able to take his interests in hand on every occasion, does not appear that she had any very strong or very attachment for him personally. Such being the we do not see what should have saved her from some



other penchant. The intelligent authoress of the *Notice*, trying on this point to contradict Saint-Simon and all the contemporaries, says : ' Why should not this charming princess have had friends and admirers, without having lovers ? ' And I take the liberty in putting precisely the contrary question : Why should she not have had what almost every princess, every great lady permitted herself at that time, and what she is supposed to have permitted herself in a slight degree ? Saint-Simon, who shows no ill-will whatever towards the Duchess of Burgundy, tells us all the details, as if he had them on the authority of the best informed confidants, of the Princess' slight partialities for M. de Nangis, for M. de Maulevrier, for the Abbé de Polignac. This Abbé, afterwards Cardinal de Polignac, is the same who constituted himself the champion of outraged Providence and morality against the poet Lucretius. He conferred on these grave subjects with the Duke of Burgundy, about the same time that he tried to make his way with the Duchess. When the Abbé left for Rome (1706), it was much remarked ' that the Duchess of Burgundy wished him a happy voyage in quite a different tone from that which she usually employed when dismissing those who took leave of her '. She shut herself up for the rest of the day in Mme. de Maintenon's apartments, with the windows closed, and had a sick headache which was not much believed in, and that ended in a flow of tears. A few days afterwards *Madame* (the mother of the Regent), while walking in the gardens at Versailles, found somewhere on a balustrade a paper which contained a satiric distich which she had not the charity to destroy. But the Duchess of Burgundy was so much loved at Court, that everybody appeared to have agreed to keep her secret, and to spare only her in that general atmosphere of backbiting. The two wretched lines, which for any other would have found a thousand echoes, were suppressed. In short, that truthful and terrible *Madame* whom I have already quoted on the article of wine-drinking, the very same who found the couplet in the garden of Versailles, supports Saint-Simon's gossip, and tells us without any more fuss in her *Memoirs* : ' At Marly the Dauphine would roam about with all the young people in the garden till three or four o'clock in the morning. The King knew nothing of these nocturnal